MRS LANCELOT

MAURICE HEWLETT

1888

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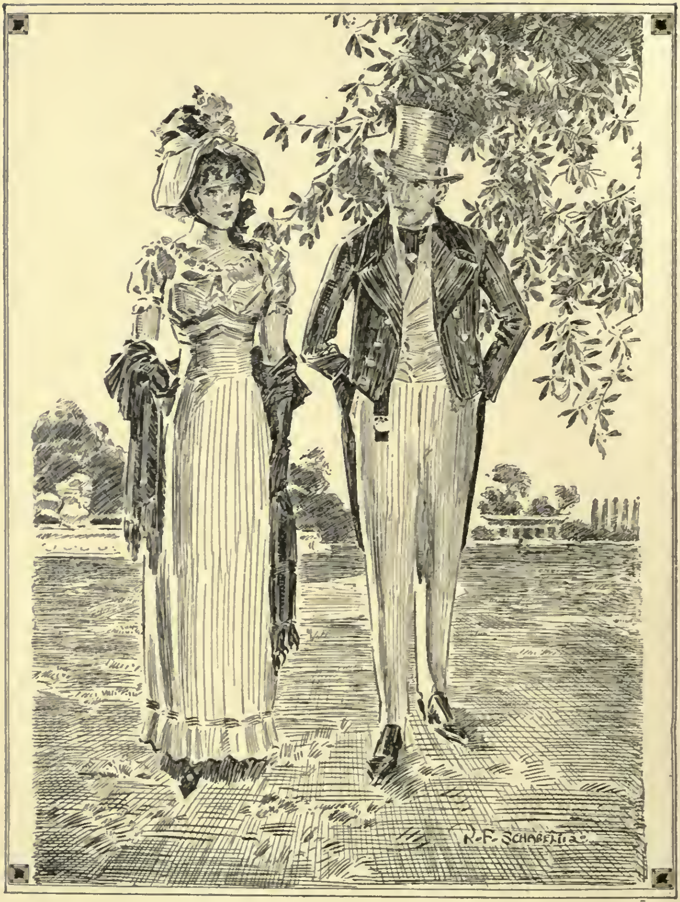
MRS. LANCELOT

A COMEDY OF ASSUMPTIONS


R. F. SCHABELITZ

He had a lovely girl pondering his words

MRS. LANCELOT

A COMEDY OF ASSUMPTIONS

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

ILLUSTRATED BY

R. F. SCHABELITZ

'Ατρείδη, ἦ ἄρ τι τόδ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἄρειον
ἔπλετο, σοὶ καὶ ἐμοί, ὅτε νῶϊ περ, ἀχνυμένω κῆρ,
θυμοβόρῳ ἔριδι μενεήναμεν εἶνεκα κούρης.

. . . .

ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν προτετύχθαι ἐάσομεν, ἀχνύμενοί περ,
θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον δαμάσαντες ἀνάγκῃ.
Il. xix. 56 ff.

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BOOK I

THE YOUNG MARRIED COUPLE

MRS. LANCELOT

I

THE CARDINAL ASSUMPTION

PARED down to the bones, so to speak, here is what happened. The Marquis was talking to three or four young men at Arthur's, where he was dining. The talk had drifted from a battle in Bermondsey to politics, and from politics to ways and means. Reform, said the Marquis, could be staved off, because an election could be staved off. The King was very ill, much worse than he chose to discover; but this was known, and a demise of the Crown was no time for an appeal to the country. If the Whigs could be beat, he (the Marquis) would take office — and hold it, with a decent backing. But where was he to get that, he wanted to know. Then it was that Lord Netherbow spoke up for the Treasury. There were a number of men there biting their nails, who could bite to better purpose. The Marquis's very blue eyes concentrated. " Name me three," he said, plying his tooth-pick. The names came out with one consent from the three or four young mouths. There was Starcross —" He 's an ass," said the Marquis; there was Filney —" And he 's another "—; there was Lancelot, who was a worker. The Marquis was now vague. His eyes regarded, but did not comprehend, the cruet-stand. " A worker, is he? " he said musingly. " They are rare. I might have an eye for him." Then he dipped the corner of his napkin and wiped his mouth with it; and then he drank his port. And that was all.

But Lord Netherbow, a smart Under Secretary, reported it next day to Clarkson, and Clarkson confided it to Jodrell, and Jodrell at luncheon-time gave it to two others, one of whom handed it on, a rounded whole, to Charles Lancelot. Each bosom as the rumor swelled its way was elated, every eye as the prospect unfolded was the brighter; but none, oddly enough, swelled less and none took less luster than the bosom, than the eyes of Charles Lancelot, for whom, as it came to him finally, Lord Monthermer, the Marquis, actually had an eye. The room in which he sat at his duties, with two other young gentlemen of similar parts and breeding, fairly hummed with the news. It seemed to lift for a moment the thick, sun-enriched dust that hung serried before the windows; but Charles Lancelot heard it unmoved. He just lifted his grave face on its long (too long) stalk of neck, and smiled palely, with a remote gaze to Whitehall, as if he saw ships on an horizon. Remote young man! As if conscious of high destiny, he palely smiled. And then he resumed the driving of his quill; and his colleagues looked at one another, and one of them said, "Cool hand, Charles."

But Charles was not at all cool, nor was his heart beating at all steadily in his breast. It was necessary to his self-esteem that he should appear so, and perhaps no one will ever realize the efforts that he made to get through that languid summer afternoon with his accustomed method and diligence; but cool he was not — neither then nor afterwards, until the conviction had settled down in his mind that a great career was opening to him. He had, I may say, always suspected it (for no one, in his quiet way, had a higher opinion of him than himself); and, now here it was — dawning upon him! When this conviction, I say, had settled itself in, his elation crystallized into a magnificent gravity, a lofty expectancy which did not add to his social charm. He had always been serious, and was now portentous, under the shadow of Lord Monthermer's eyelid; he absorbed himself in his work, and when he went out into the world exhaled it like an aura. He confided his immense secret to very few; but Mrs. Mayduke was one of those few. He told her.

Now she, being a pretty woman, was a friend of the Marquis's, and ought to have helped; but the young man deprecated her offer with a raised hand and a sideways head. "Not for the world, I beg," he had said. He had not added, but Mrs. Mayduke did — to herself — that his arrogance could not have it supposed for one moment that his future depended upon anything but merit; and Mrs. Mayduke was partly right. His golden destiny would come to him tarnished, he felt, if a woman or man of his friends should advance the hour by ten minutes; but that was not all. Charles Lancelot was so made that he would rather venture nothing at all, than venture and fail. His self-esteem was more than tender — it was raw. So it befell that when upon some occasion or another — and there may have been more than one — he met Lord Monthermer in Mrs. Mayduke's drawing-room, though he was presented to the great man, and even exchanged a few words with him, the summons of the watchful eye was not even looked for; and when afterwards from time to time the two may have met in street or assembly, nothing occurred except this remarkable thing, that Charles would hide from the embracing scope of the Marquis's eye, and seem for all the world like a hunted wretch rather than a candidate, seeking by all means to escape the hour of doom. Such tricks will self-esteem play with an otherwise reasonable man.

But none the less urgently did the overburdening consciousness of the eye and its message for him drive Lancelot to his work, and none the less anxiously was the summons awaited. Years passed; Lord Monthermer took office under the Duke of Jutland, and nothing was done — either to Charles Lancelot or, it may be owned, to the country; and then it was given out that his lordship had been appointed Envoy Extraordinary to the Congress of Cracow, whither presently his lordship departed in semi-state, where he actually was at the time this tale begins, battling for the rights of his country, and hunting three days a week with a pack of foxhounds which he had had imported from his kennels down in Hampshire. Nor, if Diana was so served, was Venus forgotten; for his lordship kept two establishments in and near Cracow. In one of them he lived with his suite; in the other a Miss Kitty Jervis reigned, a fair Cyprian whose London address was Prospect Place, Islington. But with her we have nothing at all to do.

In and through his lordship's doings, and her doings, and the rumors of them which reached our shores, Charles Lancelot of the Treasury mewed his youth and nursed his bantling convictions as best he might. He saw his foster-father in affairs out and home, saw him get a dukedom, and become " the Duke " among dukes, as before he had been "the Marquis" among marquises, and still stood upon his great assumption; encumbered with the many others which had grown parasitically round it. Now here in what follows I have put down the root of his matter, the great primary assumption which is the root also of the title of this book.

Charles Lancelot was of good family, as he was quite well aware. If he had been of better, probably he would have thought less about it; but his father had been Dean of Wryhope, and his mother was a second cousin of Lord Drem's. Eton and Trinity had had the rearing of him, with no result upon his seriousness, nor upon the curious blend of diffidence and good conceit which he presented to those of the world who cared to concern themselves with him. Acutely sensitive to outside opinion, and cautious not to provoke it before the time, he was still more sensitive to his own, and still more cautious there. Nothing, certainly, would have led him to his great assumption but the harmony it made with his intuitions. From childhood he had believed himself called to a rank out of the common reach, and against all evidence had clung to that assurance. Here then he had plain proof, the first, no doubt, of many. The assumption once made, it took root and possessed itself of his being. His destiny was indeed involved, and, with that, other destinies which got swept into the vortex of his.

For, of course, this nursling of Destiny, not at all exempt from the ordinary needs of our nature, sought for himself a sharer in his high designs; and of course this book is an account of whom he got, of how he got her — and of what he got.

An illuminative remark in Lady B——'s journal may be quoted before I get to work — a friendly, shrewd-spoken high lady she was, who thought none the worse of a great man for a *liaison,* and none the better of a woman. She was able with ease to make that curious distinction, saying, first, that the woman was necessary to the man's comfort, and, second, that she ought to be shunned for being it. Odd how these things go. Here at least is what she writes:—

". . . Large party at Bagington to meet the Duke"— Devizes, naturally: there was no other —" J——s, Lambs, Llantrissants, a sprinkling of Wingfields, Lord Alvanley, Rogers, C. Greville, Sydney: an extraordinary jumble of sheep and goats. He kept us all waiting two days —' Business of State '— and then rode over from Torcross, of *course* by the door of Her carriage. The famous Mrs. Lancelot is the most discreet Egeria I ever saw. Very pale, with serious, almost round eyes, a small mouth, beautifully shaped, she looks a prude. Thin beyond the point, but exquisitely dressed. She looks worn and very sad. Talks scarcely at all — not much more than monosyllables, *even to him* — and yet one can see what she stands for in that quarter. Close observer, misses nothing. High sense of humor, I fancy. The husband came post from town, arrived the same evening, but did not appear until breakfast. Very much at the Duke's service — perfectly proper to Her. It 's a strange *ménage!* She was with him all the morning in the library over his leather boxes, and Charles Lancelot ran about on their errands like a footman. After luncheon the Duke and she rode — alone. Evening — half of the county to dinner. Lord Winthorpe gave her his arm! The Duke took Lady W—— and had me on his other side. We talked of Burdett and Reform. He is all for musketry, recalled Bonaparte's 'whiff of grape-shot'— a certainty, he says, but doubts if he 'll get a free hand. His cabinet is very fidgety, especially Bernard J——n (whom he calls 'Mother'!). Funny to hear the drop in his voice when he refers to Her. We all think it most romantic — and had no notion how far it had gone. She had only been *lancée* since the Duchess died — but I *know* it is a long-standing affair. After dinner the men came in to tea — and the *happy pair* retired to the library, which is kept sacred to his business of all sorts. I exchanged a few civilities with her before that. She seemed to me shy, but not ill at ease — reserved, rather."

Let one example suffice for many. You may depend upon it that Charles Greville, the complacent, imperturbable gentleman, did not miss much. The curious may find it.

But there follows overleaf the following entry, curiously guarded: "The unforeseen! The Lady had an interview in the park at eleven which upset her for the rest of the day. The Duke was *deus ex machinâ,* swooped down in the nick of time and scared off the interloper. He made light of the matter with that extraordinary, apparent candor he has. He seems to be telling you everything, and tells you nothing. He gave me, for instance, a wonderful, *documenté* account of a dismissed secretary, pulling a bundle of letters out of his pocket, turning them over, opening one or two, finally reading out of one things which, I am positive, did not exist in it. I was very discreet, and so was everybody, I am glad to say. Poor little sweet, suffering creature, I am deeply sorry for her. But her *men* are devoted to her. She had a talk with Hermia Chambre, and left us in the evening. So did her *men.*"

And now, who was this lady? What had she to do with so great a man? What had the pair of them to do with blind and groaning England, for whom one of them at least was conceived to be working while she groaned? And then the husband, Charles Lancelot, running errands "like a footman"— what part had he to play? Did he run for England's, for the Duke's or for his wife's needs? And how did England take it — as all of a piece? or as the indignity too much (seeing that his grace had his windows broken, and Reform carried over him)? Or as negligible? And finally, who is Gervase Poore?

Gervase Poore, luscious and perfervid young poet, who rendered the story of Nausithoë so warmly as to move the stately reprobation of Wordsworth, and get an invitation to breakfast from Rogers, in actual truth composed that work round about the dainty person of Mrs. Lancelot; and why and how that is so, and what ensued, is a part of the business of this tale. Love, then, is one of the tenants of my new house, and politics, or what gentlemen are pleased to call politics, is another. England hardly comes in, unless by chance one whisks the draperies too high and you see her drab millions swarming like maggots in an old cheese, at the back of the scene. England is not even Chorus: her time was not yet, is hardly now. Let Tom Moore be Chorus, little chirping, musical, brave soul, him with candid Lady B—— and caustic Mr. Greville; let them chatter the interludes, but watch we our actors: Gervase Poore, serving his term in a lawyer's office; haunting his lady's whereabouts o' nights, flaming in her wake like phosphorus of the sea; hymning her heaven-high in verse, and hectoring her with scowling brows, driving her (poor gentle soul) along his appointed thorny way: watch we him for one. Monthermer, next, or Devizes, trim-whiskered, blue-eyed, armed at all points, guiding his country's chariot from his chair at White's, measuring the death-pangs of millions, taking counsel and what not from his Egeria, and dining at eight sharp — watch him next; and with him anxious Charles Lancelot, the young Treasury official, edging (how oddly) into power over England, aping his chief, plodding the dusty pavements while his grace soared serenely in the blue, running his wife's errands or setting her to run his (God knows which). These three men, and between them that tender, conscientious, pale and slim woman, Georgiana Lancelot — Strangways as she had been, Georgiana Strangways —; most anxious to do well, caring, of the four of them, most for England, listening now to her heart, now to her conscience, distracted, worn thin, pitiful, but always lovely and kind: a woman, not a saint; a martyr but not a champion: here 's the resolving element. And England, blind, groping, blundering, groaning, resumes all at the end; and, if no better, is no worse off. Here 's the tragi-comedy of Mrs. Lancelot, and I 've set the stage.

II

DIANA'S WEDDING

THOSE three fair daughters of Sir Peter and Lady Strangways — of Thorntree in Co. Glos.— whom Lawrence painted and Tom Moore sang, Diana, Georgiana and Augusta, all married well; that is to say, they married young, married in order, and married money, or place, or a prospect. Fair they were, in an age when beauty did not think to be adorned by much art, when the bosom wore no jewel but its own, and the complexion needed no aid of the paint-box; fair, healthy, wholesome girls, well-connected and tolerably read. The baronet, a sturdy squire, who sat for his county in a borough of his own, had married money as well as degree, for his lady came of the house of Polk, and was cousin to the reigning Lord Quartern; and when he went to town for the session would take Mamma and a daughter with him. The only son, Polk Strangways, the future Sir Polk, was serious and already a minor canon of Gloucester. He was married to a widow and hardly comes into this tale. It is not with his but with his sister's wedding that we begin.

Diana Strangways, a sprightly, ambitious young woman, eighteen, and in the fulness of her bloom, was shown at Almack's no more than twice. Lady J——y took her the first time, and was very well satisfied. So she might be, seeing what followed. It is Diana Strangways, dark-haired and glancing sideways and a little upwards, who in the Lawrence group stands behind her sisters, and touches, just touches, with her finger-tips her left breast. In her hair is the crescent of the huntress. Later on this was held to be prophetic, seeing whom it was she married and what came of it. But to return with her to Almack's: the second time she was taken by that kind and fashionable Miss B——, the friend, and some say more than friend, of old Lord O——, who was not long dead. And that was decisive for Diana, who may be excused for a triumphant note in her correspondence. Two days afterwards she was proposed for by Sir Carnaby Hodges, a Leicestershire magnate of fiery face and white whiskers, twice her age and a widower with children. Diana demanded a week, and took it, though she had made up her mind before she went to bed. Sitting indeed upon the edge of that sanctuary, she wrote to Georgiana, her next in age, not yet out, who was at Thorntree, fledging her wings with a governess:—"Sir Carnaby Hodges has asked for me, and I shall accept him I daresay. He is too stout for my ideal knight, and thinks of nothing but horses and dogs; but perhaps I was flattered to be thought worth adding to the stud. I admit that he is permaturely gray, that he has been passably wicked; but I had rather my husband had his wickedness behind him than before. Now don't pinch your lip, my dear! When you are as experienced as I am you will appreciate safety. You are much too romantic. I have always said so. Mr. F— (Need I say that I refer to *Rodrigo?*) will despair; but not for long. He is incurably a rover. I told you that he was at Almack's, handsome and very pale, dressed all in black — even to the shoe-buckles. He bowed, but did not ask me; when he had seen me stand up with Sir Carnaby he turned away, and I saw him cover his eyes with his hand — just for a moment, as if to brush an image away. He did not stay long. Next day I received a packet from him. I think that he kept *one* short note — but no more. He has behaved handsomely, you will agree. Now, my dearest sister, don't tease me. I am resolved to do my duty, and assure you that I shall be very well at Rothley. Not that I mean to be there more than I can help. I shall make him sit — we shall have two, if not three boroughs, with all respect to the radicals — and we shall certainly have a house in town. I shall insist upon that. Dover Street, I think." Georgiana, the serious one of the three, was perturbed and wrote her mind upon many pages; but they arrived a day after the fair Diana had accepted Sir Carnaby.

All this was in March, the wedding in August, in the early days of the recess. There was no reason for delay, with a sufficiency of money on both sides, and Sir Carnaby was anxious to get back to Leicestershire in ample time for the cubbing. He was master, you must understand, of the Rothley, whose kennels were at Rothley Harcourt, his place, and did n't feel that he could be spared. Diana, who looked well on horseback, agreed.

However, it is not upon her wedding I wish to dwell, but upon what happened to Georgiana in the course of it. Lovely bridesmaid to a handsome bride — and the adjectives are chosen — she made a serious conquest, though she was scarcely turned eighteen, and in fact knew nothing about it. But so it was. In the party from Corby, which was Lord Quartern's seat (Lord Quartern, brother of Lady Strangways), there chanced to be a young Treasury-official, one Charles Lancelot, upon whom it was currently said the Secretary of State had a favorable eye. If the Secretary of State, therefore, should be entrusted (as everybody believed) with the forming of an Administration, if he should become, in fact, First Lord, the harvest, or a sheaf of the harvest of that favoring eye might be the young man

Charles Lancelot. That, then, was the young man's capital, that and his high seriousness in the conduct of his affairs. A tall young man, dark and deferential, urbane, and somewhat conscious of his urbanity — slightly stooping, perhaps narrow in the shoulders, correctly rather than elegantly dressed, rather near-sighted, exceedingly serious; such was Mr. Charles Lancelot.

Discretion was, I believe, his foible. He may have carried it too far. There he had a lovely girl pondering his words, and he kept them even and general. He talked of the Waverley novels, and considered with Miss Georgiana how far a gentleman with reasons for concealment might go in denials. He might feel justified, at a pinch, in disclaiming all knowledge of the matter — a rebuke to impertinence, binding him to nothing — but could he deny "upon his honor"? Mr. Lancelot thought not, and quoted Lord Lansdowne, at whose table he had ventured the distinction. "To you, Miss Strangways," he had gone on, "such differentiation would savor of hypocrisy. You are, I can see, the soul of truth. I confess also that I should myself be at a loss. I hope you will not believe me capable of paltering with the divine commands. I hope I am a serious person." At any rate he took pains to be thought so — but he went no further in the declaration of his feelings than what I have reported. Upon politics he was dumb. I believe that he hardly mentioned Lord Monthermer, who was the Secretary of State with the friendly eye, more than three times a day to her; and said nothing, believe me, nothing of his eye. He spoke of his lordship's labors at Cracow, where the Polish question, legacy of Bonaparte to exhausted Europe, was then in debate; but only to extol his manner; nothing of his matter. His manner, according to Charles Lancelot, was perfect. There, for instance, you had the value of truth. "Lord Monthermer, Miss Strangways, has the lightning-stroke upon affairs. He blinds with the bare truth, while he rends the fogs of our enemies. Prince Metternich is no more proof against him than M. de Talleyrand was. He has been called blunt; but his weapon pierces, not breaks. At Cracow there was a dead set against him. The word had gone round. It was marked. His appearance in an assembly was the signal. One and all they turned their backs upon the hero — the deliverer of Europe. It was so noticeable that the Emperor himself felt bound to excuse his subjects. Did you ever hear Lord Monthermer's retort? 'Sire,' he said, 'these gentlemen present me with that part of their persons with which they have made me most familiar. So far as I am aware they have nothing else.'"

These general observations were reserved for the evening after the ceremony, when the gentlemen had finished their wine and were mostly collected about the tea-table. Miss Strangways, as she was now become, had, however, made her impression earlier in the day. He had remarked her for a shy rather than a striking beauty, and considered that pensiveness sat well upon her. Her merits of form and feature had to be sought; it flattered him to reflect that she had attracted him almost at once, that no long time had they spent in appealing to his discernment. Closelier examined, she pleased. No very high color, perhaps, in her face; but that enhanced the splendor of her eyes, which were of that hyacinth blue one associates forever, who has seen it, with the Adriatic. Her face was rounded by a firm chin, her nose fine and straight, her upper lip short and proudly curved, the lower full —" as though a bee had stung it newly." Her form, he considered, was enchanting, the bust not full but tenderly shaped. Doubtless she might have been taller, to carry so proud a gravity — but he had never cared for tall women. I rehearse the catalogue as he made it: he was in no mood for fault-finding, since he admired also her reserve. Her manner was full of courtesy, he thought, and yet she never went an inch beyond what was necessary. There was no unbosoming. He admired that, for that again reflected upon his discrimination. So far he went during the progress of the wedding ceremony as to whisper to his neighbor and hostess, Lady Quartern, behind his hat,

"A charming bride, truly."

"My niece," said Lady Quartern, by no means in a whisper.

"Impossible to doubt the relationship." Whereat Lady Quartern, a flushed and rather shiny personage, tapped his arm smartly with her fan.

"Miss Georgiana becomes Miss Strangways?" he ventured again. "One had thought that would be the place of Miss Augusta. They must be close in age."

"Georgie 's eighteen," said Lady Quartern, "and Gussy's hair is only up for the occasion. You 'll find that Georgie will fill the place."

"With discretion, I should say — she appears to be mature."

"Good heavens," said Lady Quartern, much too loudly, "she 'll lose half that figure in a year."

No conversation on these terms could be maintained by a young Treasury official. Mr. Lancelot shivered into silence. Mute though he must be, however, he did not cease to consider the figure she made, there in her shadowing hat and long ribbons, in her clinging white frock and blue sash, gravely pondering the bride's nosegay which she carried, as if to hear within its lily-tubes the voice which was to proclaim her destiny. She was, with her sister Augusta, at the head of the procession. Behind them in a bevy, tall and short, plump and willowy, were county neighbors. Stout Sir Carnaby's wrinkled back was within a yard of her nose, Diana's train shimmered at her feet. He thought to see disapproval of so glaring a contrast when for rare moments she ceased her attention to the flowers she held and gazed past the pair to the communion table, before which the horrid pact was soon to be made irrevocable — "past praying for," as Lord Quartern observed, more truly than he knew, poor man. As if to point his suspicions of her questioning mind, he overheard the pew behind him comment upon his own text.

"Well, she 's got him. He 's tallyhoed once too often — now he 's killed in the open." "A chopped fox, eh?" And then, "Old Carnaby — like a baron of Christmas beef — what 'll she make of all that brawn?" And the answer. "Make of him? Why, a pair of steps."

He committed himself no more, either to Miss Strangways' charms or Lord Monthermer's benevolent greatness, but was silent on the way back to Corby, though rallied more than once by her vigorous ladyship. In his memory remained, however, the picture of the grave young beauty seeking her fate in the lilies; and he had a good memory.

He had sought her out, as has been told, after dinner, and next morning, before the carriage and the saddle horses were ready for the return to Corby, he had the privilege of a walk with her in the garden. She took him over the park.

III

GEORGIANA'S FATE

GEORGIANA STRANGWAYS, at the age of eighteen, being a serious-minded girl, felt herself ushered to the threshold of life by these recent ceremonies. She seemed to stand there, looking through the door at the sunny distances, the dim blue hills, the far cumulus clouds, gold-litten at the edges. She was conscious of heart-beats. She seemed suddenly to realize that she had something to keep, something to take with her as she fared forth. Everything done to her by way of preparation, the curious ritual, for instance, of clothes, by which they uncover a girl's bosom and cover her ankles, put up her hair and cut down her bodices, seemed (she could not tell why) to be filled with symbolism. She thought now that these things foreshadowed Diana's wedding, and forewarned her of hers. Of her wedding indeed! That such was to be her portion was a matter of course. She had known that since she had known anything at all, but it had been Di's affair which had made the certainty a fluttering matter. Not that there was much in

Sir Carnaby to cause flutterings; certainly his jocular references to *beaux* and *belles* and wedding bells, and such like had had the opposite effect. The less he dwelt upon marriage the more chance for her heart to rise at the prospect. Augusta, her younger sister, judging Sir Carnaby and marriage with the clear, critical eyes, and from the safe standpoint of fifteen, had wondered how Di could do it, but Georgiana, nearer to the brink by three years, found her speculations absorbed in the probability that she herself would have to do it within a measurable time. She was a serious-minded girl, to whom marriage meant by no means enlargement, as it had exclusively to Diana. It meant, rather, a call. Some mysterious personage, a shape, an emanation — in fact, Love — robed, possibly winged, certainly crowned with a star or stars, appeared at your bedside in the gray of dawn, was discovered there by your slow-opening eyes, or discovered himself by a touch upon your forehead. You looked up awfully at his serene, rapt face. "Come, for you are chosen. I will show you to the bridegroom," he said, or you thought him to say; and you arose and followed him. This was the way of it; but she did not discuss the matter with Gussy. Gussy's concern, ever since the wedding, had been wholly with ways and means. "How could she have done it? How could she? Georgie, I hope you won't be so impulsive. You ought to be sure of yourself beforehand. Could n't you try with Mr. Markby?"

Mr. Markby was a young man from Gloster who came over to Thorntree every Monday morning to teach the rudiments of drawing. Georgiana had smiled. Mr. Markby was chiefly remarked in the family for his enlarged knuckles, which cracked as he opened and shut his hands. They seemed to rub together like walnuts. It was at this moment, or near it, that Gussy had remembered Mr. Charles Lancelot.

"I thought he liked to be with you," she had said. "Don't you call it paying marked attentions, when they walk with you like that, and agree with everything you say?"

Georgiana showed a slight increase of color, but no embarrassment. "He did n't agree with me, because I did n't say anything in particular. He mostly talked himself."

"Did you fancy him?" Gussy asked, all her soul intent upon the answer.

"I think that a very unpleasant word," Georgiana had replied. "The maids use it. We don't consider gentlemen like that."

"Oh, yes, we do," Gussy declared. "We do, but we don't say so. That is the difference. I believe it will be found out one of these days that we are all exactly the same."

Georgiana did not deny, but did not for one moment believe it. She was a reader of poetry. There was much that was attractive in the Byronic lover — a tempestuous young man, mostly in a bad temper, whose feelings of passion made him very uncomfortable, and were vented upon the women of his acquaintance with disastrous results.

Other guests at the recent wedding were referred to at frequent intervals through that still July weather. There had been Mr. Rose, for instance, Mr. Adolphus Rose, whose " Poems expressive of Emotions induced by Reminiscence, chiefly of travel in the Levant," met and challenged Mr. Wordsworth on his own ground, and in the opinion of the partial beat him there. Mr. Rose had been a wedding guest. His round face and red whiskers, his thick calves, his badly-folded stock had all been remarked by Miss Gussy, who did not put him forward seriously as a rival to Mr. Charles Lancelot. Georgiana too had remarked upon Mr. Rose's peculiarities but did not admit it to her sister. The more she liked poetry, the less she liked Mr. Adolphus Rose. If poets were on that model, better, by far, not know them.

Lord Monthermer came up for discussion — a great man indeed. Did Mr. Lancelot really know him? Mr. Lancelot, it seems, really did. He had called him " his chief "— by which, of course, he meant " leader of opinion," for chief in any other sense he was not — at present; and then he had related anecdotes. One or two of these were regaled. Gussy, with the uncompromising eyes of fifteen, had measured them up as they came. "I believe that Lord Monthermer is greater than that," she had said; "but I believe that Mr. Lancelot is not. They seem to me to be about his size." If Georgiana had not been so dreadfully conscious of the brink, of the pending apparition of the tall and serene angel, of the voice saying "Come," she would have been able to agree with her sister. But just now all men seemed to be enhanced by a premonitory glow, a sort of false dawn. She felt conscious that Mr. Lancelot must not be touched by such a daring hand; was certain that, at any rate, she could have no part in such criticisms. It seemed proper to tell Gussy that she did n't know what she was talking about; and that would have been done if she could have been certain of the command of her blushes. As it was, she dismissed the subject with a sarcasm. "We are talking like the people in the servants' hall," she said. "Let 's be reasonable, my dear. One wedding should last a family for a long time."

"It never does," Gussy said. "They 're fearfully catching things. I wish it was my turn."

Letters began to come, in due course, from the adventurous Diana, telling chiefly of hunting feats with the Rothley. Nothing about Sir Carnaby's affection. She would certainly stay in the country till February, when Parliament was to meet, and they should all find one another in London. Papa would come to town, of course, as usual. "I have n't a house yet, which is rather vexing, as I am telling my friends that they must be sure to rally to my circle. We shall be mostly political, and, of course, anti-Reform, but must have a sprinkling of literary persons. They are all Jacobins, I hear, and very dangerous, like that dreadful Mr. Leigh Hunt, who spends so much time in prison. But Carnaby knows somebody who knows Mrs. Nelthorpe. If we could get her! I am told she is extremely witty. And her beauty is undeniable. I still hope for Dover Street, though Carnaby vows that it will ruin him. Your friend Mr. Lancelot has chambers in Albany, I am told. I have asked him to call. He was staying with the Burntislands the other day, but did not hunt. I met him at dinner. He spoke guardedly of you. I must say he is a prudent young man (he cherishes his future!), but, I think, very handsome. Carnaby calls him a goose, a parboiled goose. He is very violent, but as good as gold, the most manageable of men when you have found out his little peculiarities. They are very small. For one thing, he *hates* being kept waiting for dinner, and though devoted to me, never dreams of restraining his fury if that happens. He pulled the bell down twice last week, and once rushed into the kitchen and called Mrs. Pownace an old b—h. He called her other things besides, but my pen refuses the task of reporting all that he said. As I say, dearest, he is my slave at all other times — but not then. I admit it. And in the field he is, of course, supreme. I have not a word to say. With these trifling drawbacks I am, as I ought to consider myself, the most fortunate of women. His drinking powers have been shamefully exaggerated." The letter finally concluded, "Now, my dearest Georgie, won't you make us happy by a visit? I assure you Carnaby expects it, and frequently refers to it. 'Your pretty sister,' he calls you, or 'that pretty demure little rogue.' Indeed, he thinks a great deal of you, and has a high opinion of your capacity. Charles Lancelot is not nearly good enough for you, though he admits that with the Marquis's interest he might do great things." The invitation was pressed, and accepted. Georgiana stayed three months in Leicestershire, and the interest which Mr. Lancelot had inspired in the bosom of Lady Hodges was reinvested in his favor with a will. It is surprising what momentum a man may acquire in this manner. Lancelot did nothing, and for all that appeared may have intended nothing at all; but he got himself fixed in the girl's head as impending. It would have required a very resolute or very impetuous wooer to have outvalued him — so long as he said nothing.

But though she spent Christmas with her sister, and though the Hodges' revels were loud and long and frequent; though she danced out the pointed toes of her little shoes half a dozen times before February came,— there were no other suitors. The young bloods of Leicestershire — a Corinthian county — looked for more positive charms in a partner than clear gray eyes, a delicate flush, and a Greek profile. Were her eyes gray or blue? It is difficult to be precise, since they varied with the light. When the candles came in, they showed all black. In the mornings they were almost cold in their grayness; and at noon they were hyacinthine, like a summer sea. Large they were, too, and limpid, and could be very tender. Dangerous eyes, you would have said, but not to Leicestershire, which demanded sparkle. Now Georgiana was of the sort which does not sparkle provocatively, but only when kindled; and Leicestershire had not that to inflame her. As we should say now, the county bored her; and so it was that she did not impress the county. She was too quiet, and when she did speak, too direct. She never had the vapors, she was slow to move; she had no affectations, did not cling to the house on wet days or haunt the shrubberies on showery ones. She neither swooned nor clouded with tears; and on the other hand, she did not ride to hounds. Again, she was a reader, and Leicestershire read nothing; again, she was not blue. Now, Leicestershire said, a girl should be one thing or another; but she must needs be expressed by negatives at this period of her life. There were many things that she was not; and what things she may have been it passed the wit of Leicestershire and the Rothley Hunt to discover. Stalwart young men in high-collared coats pressed her to their hearts and whirled her about — up the middle and down again, and so on. She danced beautifully, like a fairy, said the poetical. You could hardly see her feet, said some. She was so light that you could n't be sure you had her. "Now a man wants an armful, Lady Hodges. 'Pon my honor, your charming sister is a feather-weight. Sylph-like, eh? So she is. But we look for bone in the shires." Diana, herself of the dainty type, knew that it was no good saying anything to Georgie. Georgie was obstinate and very deliberate. But she was thrown away upon Leicestershire, which thought Diana capital fun, and that a girl should be like an apple dumpling.

Georgiana's own view of herself was very depressed at this time, and perhaps it 's no wonder. She was conscious that she had taken her first flight through the door, and had not pleased. She wrote herself down as humdrum, guardedly (as was her manner) to Gussy at home, but more freely in her journal. "They have nothing to say to me, and I nothing to them. They come bouncing in from their hunting, full of appetite; look me all over as if wondering where to begin, fall to with zest, and then put me on the side of the plate — all gristle and little bones, like an *old* French partridge. Must men always be so red, I wonder? These all look as Marsyas must have been when Apollo had taken off a skin. They shine with health; and when they get rather old they take a purple tinge. . . . We hardly ever see them after dinner, or if we do, had rather not. . . . The only book in this house is Blair's "The Grave." There are other things in boards which I cannot admit as books." Later on we find: "We dined at Saxelby, and *my fate* was mentioned. He had been coming, but was detained at the last minute. I saw his letter of excuses — very polite, but formal. No name."

IV

THE SUIT

SIR PETER STRANGWAYS, who was a fine-looking man, and sat for a borough of his own, came up, as his custom was, to London in February, knowing, as he always did, that he was a fool for his pains. He could easily have got a pair, and what is the use of being able to put yourself in Parliament if you cannot take yourself out of it when it suits you? In the county he was something, in London much less. In the county he had his broad-eaved, wide-winged house, his park, his lime-tree avenue, his lake, his farms, his Petty Sessions and his Quarter Sessions. In London he had dark lodgings in Wimpole Street, his club window for mornings and the House for afternoons. He made his bow on birthdays, and saw his wife into her chariot for drawing-rooms. Then he went back into the dark lodging and stood tapping his teeth with his glasses at the window until it was time to go back to the House. To be a baronet, and not a very rich baronet, in London; to have for your wife an honorable lady, whose family did little or nothing for you, and stayed in the country when it might have been your right hand in town — these were unsubstantial privileges. Sir Peter never spent a session in this manner without swearing it should be the last. But this particular session had an importance of its own, he had been told.

It is true that one of the first to call in Wimpole Street was a tall and serious-faced young gentleman, dark, grave-eyed, circumspect and cold in manner who, alighting from a bay horse and handing up the reins to a groom, tapped the knocker briskly and gave the name of "Mr. Charles Lancelot, to wait upon her ladyship." It is true that, one of the first, he was also one of the most persistent. But it is also true that, to Sir Peter Strangways, who was an open-minded man, he was one of the most insupportable of his wife's guests. Sir Peter, indeed, disliked Mr. Lancelot, for he was afraid of him, and only called him a whippersnapper or a hop-o'-my-thumb when he was not there — when nobody, in fact, was there but his coachman who served him, in London, for valet and buckled his stock for him as if it were breeching, with a knee elevated towards (but just not touching) the small of his back. The saucy Miss Augusta used to surmise that Plumer whistled at her papa, and said, "Woo, 'oss," and "Stand steady, ye old foxy," as he buckled and strapped him. But this was only surmise, because Miss

Augusta, still in pig-tails and rather short skirts, remained at Thorntree with her governess, Miss Tinsley. To the trusty Plumer it was that Sir Peter confided his distrust of the sober young gentleman, by nods and winks, by veiled references to "young Mr. Superfine," or "young Buckram," or open declarations that he was not going to be downed by a young god in breeches. Plumer, for his part, found consolation in the horse which Mr. Lancelot bestrode. The gentleman had, said Plumer, a good seat and good hands; and if he could sit that spanking bay, the plague was in it if he could n't be trusted with a wife. Whereupon, "Who said he wanted a wife, you fool?" would cry Sir Peter with a snort, and Plumer stood rebuked.

Mr. Lancelot, however, pursuing a line of conduct which he had thought out beforehand as suitable to the occasion, was extremely deferential to Sir Peter (whom he called "sir" and bored extremely); to her ladyship, who liked good manners; and to Miss Strangways, whom he never called Miss Georgiana. That was a country trick, perhaps, and Mr. Lancelot was a very Londonish young man. Besides, he had his ideas and his line of conduct. Briefly, this may be indicated as implying attentions and expecting them. Lady Strangways quite understood. Nothing was said, but everything was implied. Georgiana, standing in her delicate beauty before the open door, was to be reasoned into wedlock by those tremendous silent arguments which stated nothing and assume everything.

She had nobody to advise her, nobody in whom she could have confided even if she had been of the temper for confidences. Her dreams of a lover heralded at dawn by an angel, a finger on his lip and the message alight in his eyes, of love like a warm wind enwrapping her, wafting her out through the door into the sunny space beyond — why, they were dreams, of course. Before the measured advance of the severe young Treasury clerk they melted as the hoar-frost on the lawn. Without knowing it, without a plain word she had accepted the position. There was nothing to be done but to lay her hands in her lap and wait. As for her dreams, now she dreamed no more; and if the truth must be told, instead of "Lalla Rookh" and "The Corsair," instead of "Marmion" and "The Pleasures of Memory" she now applied herself to Mr. Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution," and did her best to admire the "Letters of Junius."

The course of this ordered wooing may be briefly indicated. Mr. Lancelot called frequently, dined three times in Wimpole Street, brought cards for Almack's, tickets for the opera, rode beside the Strangways' carriage in Hyde Park. When Georgiana was presented he offered a bouquet; wherever she was taken, to rout, assembly or ball, he was present. He danced correctly but without vivacity. He could not make a false step, was incapable of a happy one. At intervals, but never in privacy, he conversed with Georgiana — on politics, on foreign travel (he had made the French-Italian-Swiss tour, but had not been to the Levant), upon the Fine Arts, upon English literature — but not poetry. Poetry, he owned, fatigued him. Much of it he thought subversive of morals, but admitted the elegance of Pope and the didactic force of Johnson; some of it was surely merely laxative. If he must read modern poetry, it should be that of Mr. Crabbe. He found there a measure of judgment which could hardly perhaps be better stated in a blue-book. "To be elegant, Miss Strangways, should not involve inexactness of statement; a refined understanding may coexist, surely, with sound brain-work. In Mr. Crabbe's curious tales, my intelligence is never shocked. Lawful curiosity is gratified; amusement is not absent; taste is admitted. Mr. Crabbe rarely offends the most refined sensibility. I am sure that you must admire this poet." Georgiana faintly defended Sir Walter Scott. Lord Byron's work she did not attempt to discuss.

All this was very oppressive, but quite customary. Everything went as everything in such affairs did go — by assumption. Georgiana's parents assumed the wooer, assumed the wooed; Georgiana herself assumed Mr. Lancelot's desires, and was ready, at the word of command, to assume her own; and as for Mr. Lancelot, he assumed all that could be assumed; assumed himself desirable, and desired, assumed his future and her interest in it; was ready, in fact, to "assume the God." There were no raptures anywhere, in any bosom. Mr. Lancelot was no Giaour who would carry her heart and understanding by storm; and yet it was evident that she had found favor in his eyes. Modest-minded as she was, she had to admit that. She knew, that is, that he admired her, knew that she was being courted. His eyes, for instance, swept the assembly the moment he entered it until they had found hers, after that never left them for long. He was always at hand to escort her in or out of a room; when she spoke he was all attention; when she remained long silent, he became silent also. What she did not know was that he was really in love with her, in his sedate and cautious way. So far as he had a passionate need it was for her. So far as he realized womanly perfections he saw them in her. He admired her quiet and clear beauty, respected her good sense, believed that he should work the better and advance the higher with her beside him. He was really proud that so great a man as the Marquis of Monthermer should have him in his eye, not for the glory it was to his repute, but that he might throw himself all glorious as he might be at Georgiana's feet. That is the real thing; that is genuine love; but he was quite incapable of expressing it, and would indeed have been shocked at the notion of such a thing. He would have judged it the height of indecorum, being one of those innumerable Englishmen who have been reared up to distrust every instinct which may be the subject of thought. To love is not shameful, perhaps; but to admit yourself a lover, to act like one, is unbecoming. So we disguise our feelings, and in the marriage service are careful to inform the world that the sacrament was instituted for the procreation of children. This was a statement which young Mr. Lancelot would have quite seriously maintained.

So the affair ran its appointed course before her very eyes. She saw herself passive, with quiet limbs, watching indifferently all the stages of the assault. The spring passed, the summer came to the full, the prorogation was in sight before Charles made any serious attack. He hovered, he hovered forever; he was assiduous, implied devotion in every stoop of his shoulders toward her. He was overpoweringly attentive, and Georgiana, wondering in her own mind that she was not overcome, was shocked at her want of sensibility. She sat like a shadowed dove, and listened while he did everything but woo her. But at last, being so much upon her mind, he got to be upon her nerves; so that when one night in July — at D—e House, at a great assembly — he quite suddenly changed his tone, and with tremulousness said, " Miss Strangways — beloved Miss Strangways — pardon me — Georgiana! I can contend no longer with my feelings. Let me implore you to listen to my vows of devotion — let me assure you that my happiness, welfare, hopes are centered in you! By this hand "— which he now took —" I beseech you to tell me — may I hope that you have some regard for me? " When this, quite suddenly, came beating at her ears like wings, she was so much disconcerted by the strain that she burst into tears, and hid her face in her hands. Mr. Lancelot, moved at last to forget himself and his duties to society, was disturbed; he entreated her to calm herself, and offered to go away. She had no reply for him, being incapable of speech, and very much ashamed of herself, although it 's true her heart was saying to her all the time, " You foolish girl, you see that after all you *have* sensibility." Another assumption was added to the heap. It was true enough that she had sensibility, but very doubtful whether Lancelot's personality had evoked it.

There was nothing for it, however, just now but to ask him to go away. She did it by an appealing look — a momentary thing. He bowed and left her. She hid herself, so far as she could, in the shrubberies which, on this gracious summer night, were at the disposal of the ducal guests, but presently returned to the shelter of her mother's turban and feathers. Lady Strangways, after one keen look, realized what had taken place, and really felt that all was as it should be. Tears in a courtship were as proper as a rash to measles.

She was not a bad sort of woman by any means, but there was no reason why she should rise above her natural capacity. She had been trained without intelligence, and had not very much of her own. She thought, so far as she thought at all, in maxims like those we have in our copy-books; and she had no feelings to speak of, and not much sensation. Any kind of intimacy with her children was out of the question, and would have been to her mind improper. Her husband was always Sir Peter, even to herself. Her instincts, toward him and toward their joint issue, were functions rather than desires. She was incapable of seeing, therefore, why Georgiana's affair should be more serious to Georgiana than Diana's had been to Diana, or her own to herself. She disregarded the signs of distress in the girl's shining eyes and storm-painted cheeks, and contented herself by saying on the way home that she would speak with her after breakfast in the morning-room. Georgiana, dumb beside her, murmured, "Very well, Mamma," and betook herself to her bed. Before going thither she knelt beside it and begged God very earnestly to inform her heart with love for Charles. She so named him for the first time. Then, too serious to cry any more, she composed herself for sleep as a novice might upon the eve of her initiation. To-night a prayer, to-morrow the veil; between them calm sleep at the feet of Providence.

The interview was short and to the point.

"Mr. Lancelot — I should say, Charles," said Lady Strangways, "has told you the state of his feelings, I imagine?"

Georgiana faltered that he had.

"He seems to me a very superior young man. You are fortunate, I think."

Georgiana murmured polite agreement. "Very fortunate, Mamma."

"Your prospects may be brilliant — far more so than poor Diana's. Sir Carnaby is respectable, but nothing more — for that sort of title gives no real distinction. A knight has the same style exactly. But Charles may make a great figure in the world. Politics! You know, I suppose, that Lord Monthermer has him in his eye?"

"He has told me that, Mamma."

"That speaks for him better than anything that

I can tell you. If he has got into Lord Monthermer's eye he may go anywhere. It means talent and capacity — but, of course, he 's very well connected. Distantly he is related to the Drem family."

"I know he is," said Georgiana without much enthusiasm.

Lady Strangways took her hand. "Much will depend upon you, my child. Lord Monthermer is a great statesman, of the old school. He is very fond of the society of young ladies. You will find many occasions of serving your husband. I am sure you will bear them in mind."

"I should try, of course," said Georgiana, who did not follow her mother's train of thought.

"A great deal will depend upon you," Lady Strangways repeated, "if I know anything of Lord Monthermer. And I do know — something." This might have been mysterious if Georgiana had been listening. But she had other things to think about, or to feel about.

Finally Georgiana was kissed and told to be a good girl. There the matter ended, so far as she was immediately concerned. She found herself betrothed.

At a quarter past four Mr. Lancelot was announced to her ladyship, kissed her hand, and remained for a short time in conversation, standing on the hearth-rug, with one arm on the mantelpiece. Lady Strangways presently desired him to ring the bell.

"Ask Miss Strangways to come to me," she bade the man-servant.

In due course Georgiana stood in the doorway in her high-waisted white frock and blue sash, with her piled hair showing the slimness of her neck and beautiful shape of her head. She was delicately flushed from the brows to the bosom, her eyes were round and very blue — rather scared. Her lips were primly drawn into a bud.

"Come here, my child." She came and gave mamma her hand. She did not lift her eyes. Lady Strangways transferred the hand to its new owner. "Take her, my dear Charles," she said, "and be assured of her affection. I am positive that she will be to you all that a wife should be. Before you go, you will of course see Sir Peter, who is in the library."

Lancelot, who was really moved, looked at his capture with misty eyes.

"I leave you to your little chat," said her ladyship. "You have to be in the House, I suppose? I know that your time is not your own."

Then she left the room, and Charles Lancelot dropped to one knee.

V

THE LETTER

SIR PETER STRANGWAYS, asleep in what was called the library, and was only not the dining-room because a door was shut, received the suitor with heavy cordiality. He had been schooled beforehand.

"Glad to see you, sir, and I think I may guess at your errand. Cupid has been favorable, I doubt not. He is a friend to the bold — eh? Well, well — I found it so myself in my young days. Now let me hear what you have to say."

Lancelot explained himself. It was not very splendid perhaps.

"Five hundred a year, rising to seven hundred and fifty! Ah, and a private fortune of three hundred a year. My dear young friend, in these days —! H'm, h'm — we must talk this over, you know. We must feel our way here."

Mr. Lancelot now referred to the Secretary of State's eye. Yes, yes, Sir Peter had heard about all that. Had his lordship committed himself — on paper? His lordship, it seems, had not, but was known to be dissatisfied with poor

Spendlove. Spendlove, his lordship said, was a donkey. He had told Lord Drem (a distant cousin of Mr. Lancelot's) that he must get a better man than Spendlove — a man to answer questions in the House. Lord Drem had named his relative, and a borough; had named them in the same breath. All this had been just before his lordship's departure for Cracow — where Spendlove, it seems, was not distinguishing himself.

Then there had been a conversation between his lordship and Charles. It had been short — but Lord Monthermer was always short in conversation — short, but rather memorable. His lordship had said that of Spendlove which Charles did not care to repeat, and had asked him (Charles) two questions: "Can you write a letter?" and "Can you sit a horse?" The bearing of the second question was only visible to those acquainted with his lordship's habits. All such knew that it was his custom to dictate answers to his letters as he cantered in the park before breakfast. Now Spendlove was an indifferent rider. Further than this Charles could not go; but the range of his lordship's eye was known to be wide, and it was common talk in the Treasury that it was apt to center upon Charles in any general assembly.

Sir Peter listened to these suggestive speculations with his glasses, as usual, beating a tattoo upon his teeth. In the end, he admitted that

Georgiana had ten thousand pounds, and thought that they might do pretty well. He then shook Charles by the hand, stretched himself and declared that he should just toddle into White's for an hour before dinner.

Charles Lancelot took his leave without seeing his betrothed again, mounted his horse and went down to the House of Commons at a sober walk.

That night Georgiana wrote to Gussy at Thorntree.

"My dearest Augusta, I must tell you my news, which is that Mr. Lancelot — whom I must now call Charles — proposed to me last night at the Duchess's ball. You will laugh at me when I tell you that I was very much surprised and that I cried, and could n't answer him; but it is true nevertheless. Of course I had been thinking a good deal about him for some time, as he had paid me great attentions. But I suppose one is always taken aback when it comes to the point. I did not expect him to say anything, then, at any rate. I could n't say anything to him, so (most considerately) he left me, but I suppose spoke immediately to mamma, for she told me that she wished to see me this morning, and did so. She told me that I was very fortunate and that I could be of great use to Charles in his career.

She said that Lord Monthermer, his chief (or his future chief: I don't really know which), is fond of ladies' society, and seemed to think that he would like mine. I must say that that is very unlikely, as he has never seen me, and cannot therefore know how dull I am in company, and how much afraid of clever men. I am very much afraid of Charles, though he is all kindness and respect. He kissed my hand after mamma had left him alone with me, and spoke very feelingly about his sense of obligation to me, and his belief that we should be the happiest couple in London. He was extremely kind. He went on then to talk of the future, of his political ambitions, etc. He said that in these days of popular discontent and dangerous tendencies against the throne and the orders of society, it was of the highest importance that men of family and education should unite to crush in their infancy all germs of faction. He hopes for a borough of Lord Drem's, who is a cousin of his, and that then Lord Monthermer will make him a parliamentary secretary, at first unpaid. He thinks that he may rise to be a lord of the Treasury. To work for me, he said, was the dearest wish of his life. His language is well chosen and very dignified, but grave. He very seldom smiles, never laughs. I still think him extremely handsome. He dresses with great care, and looks well on horseback. [Then follows the anecdote about Lord Monthermer dictating in the park.]

"Dearest Gussy, do write to me and wish me joy. If you had been here I should have had a thousand things to tell you. I expect that I shall have a betrothal ring to-morrow. I have chosen pearls, because I love them so. Charles said that diamonds were not becoming to so young a betrothed, though I shall be twenty when I am married. He is thirty, which is just the right difference, I think. The wedding will be at Thorntree, I 'm glad to say, in November. Polk will be one of the officiating clergymen, I suppose. I am writing to him, and of course to dearest Di. I know that she admires Charles, and I hope you will too, when you know him.

"We shall be home by the end of the month, I hope. I am longing to see my sister again, and I wish to believe that she shares the feeling. She knows that my engagement will make no difference between us.

"Dearest Gussy, will you contrive by hook or by crook to let Henry Perrin know this news? You might get a moment after church, or perhaps when you meet him in the village. I don't feel that I can write to him very well. I should like him to know if possible before we return. Of course all that was quite hopeless.

"I am going to be very happy, and very useful to Charles. It is a great thing for a girl to have such privileges as I have. Mamma says so, and I am sure that she is right. I have a great many letters to write. There are Uncle and Aunt Quartern, Aunt Venables, to say nothing of grandmamma!

"Adieu, dearest sister, and wish me joy.—Your fond Georgie.

"P. S. We are to look at a house soon, which papa thinks would be suitable. It is in Smith Square near Westminster Abbey — very convenient for the House, when we get there!"

VI

HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNTS

THE wedding was done quietly at Thorntree on a very wet and windy day. The great elms on the lawn before the window rocked themselves about and scattered their last pale largess to the sodden grass. The rooks were tossed in the sky like black flakes, and in gusts the rain battered at the windows. Church was considered to be out of the question, so a message was sent down, at the last minute, to Dr. Mumby, the rector, to say that the ceremony would take place in the drawing-room; and Dr. Mumby in due course arrived in his great riding-cape, with his canonicals in a little black bag. The village was greatly disappointed; but they rang the church bells before and after the wedding.

There were four bridesmaids. Diana had had six.

Lord Drem, a fine and ruddy man of five-and-forty, with a very handsome wife; an elderly Miss Lancelot (from whom her nephew had expectations), two gentlemen friends from the Treasury, and a brother, James Lancelot, of the Common

Law bar, represented the bridegroom's party. His sister Maria was a bridesmaid.

The Quarterns brought a small host from Corby; and of course Sir Carnaby and Diana Hodges came.

After breakfast, at which the best speech by far was made by Polk Strangways — it was really a sort of sermon, but more optimistic than most sermons — the happy pair departed for Bristol, whence they intended to take ship for Leghorn and the honeymoon. That was to be spent in Italy. They must needs be back early in the New Year, not only because the House would meet in February, but because Lord Monthermer was expected from Cracow and it was very necessary that his eye in its homeward sweep should encounter and remain upon the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lancelot. "We cannot afford to seem negligent in such a matter," Charles had told his affianced. "I shall have advice from London — and no doubt the court at Florence will give us news. I am sure my Georgiana agrees with me." His Georgiana satisfied him on that point. That was but one of the many of his assumptions which she took up.

Everybody agreed that the bride looked charming. Charles was a tall young man and beside him she looked slim and little. She was very shy, and her lips would have been better for more color. Her eyes looked enormous, and of so dark a blue as to seem black. "Not a taking beauty," said Lady Quartern. "You have to look hard at her to see her at all. Rather like a ghost, you know. She 's thinner than she was last year."

"There 's hardly anything of her," her neighbor replied — old Squire Wilmot of Dropmore, who wore gold spectacles burning upon his crimson forehead, and was never known to put them anywhere else. He used them for reading, it was said, but as he never read anything —

"She 's a worrying girl, in my opinion," Lady Quartern went on. "She 'll get thinner than that unless her Charles treats her well. But so far as I can see she might as well have married a ramrod. However —" The weather, you see, was against enthusiasm; and Charles Lancelot's manner discouraged it. Lord Drem said that he took her as very young members take the oath. He himself was all in favor of Gretna Green and moonlight nights. As for Georgiana, who can tell what her feelings may have been? She was never invited to reveal them.

Haunted though she may have seemed in her veiled whiteness, she was delicious when she came down in her traveling gear; her dark blue pelisse, her great blue bonnet, her furs and feathers. Her eyes sparkled, her lips parted, her little teeth gleamed. She kissed mamma, was kissed by papa, blessed by Polk, hugged by Gussy and Di. She kissed a number of the people, and was kissed by others, shook hands with the servants, and jumped into the chaise and pair like a bird. A last whisper from Gussy on the steps of the house had made her blush; her last look, sidelong, was for Gussy, and showed roguery lurking. That pert child had put lips to her ear. "Has he kissed you yet?" "Yes, of course." "But properly—?" No reply. "I thought not," whispered Gussy. *"Make him do it."* The sidelong look had been her reply. The postilion cracked his whip, the slipper was flung (gravely, by Polk, as if he were scattering the good seed); off they went, for Bristol and Leghorn, and whether indeed she then, or afterwards, followed Gussy's last injunction is not by me to be reported, but is to be inferred by the judicious reader from what follows. All I know is that her letters home were copious, but, to Gussy, unsatisfying. There was a great deal about the court in Florence, and much about the magnificence of Rome — but of Charles as a lover, nothing at all.

My Lord Marquis of Monthermer came home to his country in March of the next year and was received with every demonstration of gratitude from King and people. His acts and deeds at Cracow, it was universally admitted, entitled him to all the honors of an affectionate race. England's honor and material advantage had not been forgotten; due regard had been had for the equitable claims of France, of Prussia, of Austria, of Russia — just so much as was their due from our proud island breed and no more. The only nation omitted from this catalogue appears to have been Poland. On these grounds there were great rejoicings, and a great reception. The King was ill, believed to be dying, but he had his lordship down to see him at Windsor, called him Tom, and promised him a duchy. The populace greeted their hero in a more boisterous but no homelier fashion. They lined the Kent Road, threw up their caps. Some of them shouted, "Give us Reform!" and made his lordship grin. "I 'll be damned if I do," he said, for the benefit of his gentlemen. He had, in fact, hastened his return in order to put a stopper on that move, if it might even now be stopped. His hope was in the King, who was known to hate it so much that he remained alive for the purpose of "dishing Grey," as he put it himself. But he knew that the King's was a precarious life — besides, as he said, "He 's such a liar that you can't hold him anvwhere." However, here he was; here was Piccadilly flaming with lanterns from end to end; a crowd all day about Wake House, and a duchy for the asking —

or without it; for Lord Monthermer never asked for a thing, but waited until it was offered: then he took it or not, as might suit.

That was in March, in mild and open weather; but the Lancelots had returned in the bitter fogs of January to their house in Smith Square, and by the time the great man was really come the little lady of that house was settled into a staid routine from which, she supposed sometimes, nothing but revolution could ever move her.

Don't suppose, pray, that she wished to be moved from it. Nothing of the sort. She was an enthusiastic housewife, glorying in her duties, taking them seriously, getting herself into a glow of health and beauty in their vigorous exercise; watching intently as a bird a crumb for the daily occasion when she could be of service to Charles. How she drilled her three maids, how she lectured the page-boy (for his good), how she overlooked the linen, saw to the nightly deposit of the plate under the bed, how she frowned over accounts, ordered dinner, presided at it, broke her little heart over a tough cutlet, and mended it again with thanksgiving over a good pudding — were long and foolish, though (to me) touching to tell. These things are common knowledge; but so is the sunshine over a copse, so are the cloud shadows racing over a hill-flank, so the opening of the rose. Like a rose she opened, like a rose quietly bloomed;

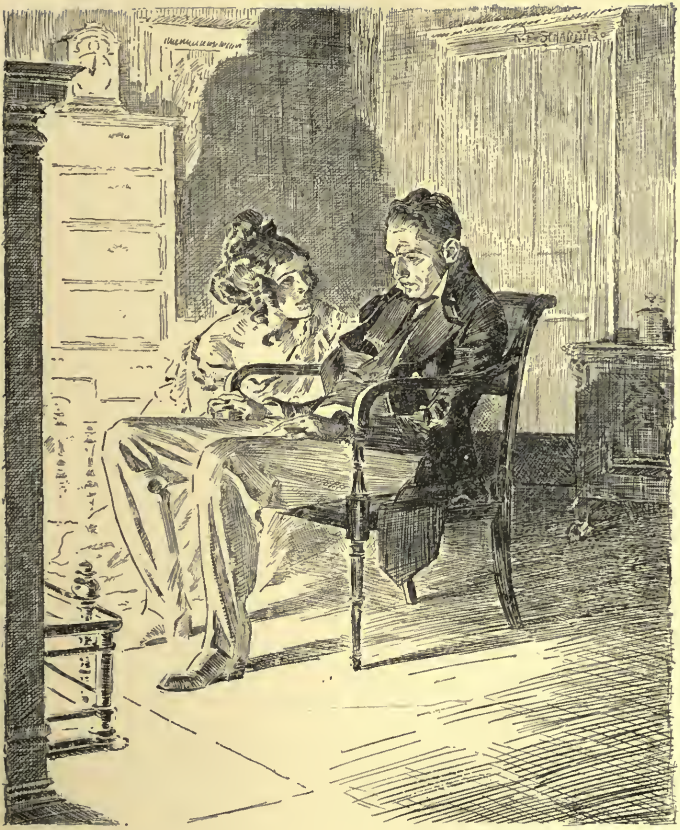
and Charles grew sleek and snug under the ministration of her gentle hands.

And Charles was very kind to her, and always courteous; and when he reproved her, did it kindly; and when she cried on his shoulder, he patted hers.

He was grave, and preoccupied, and immersed in business, full of thought for the morrow — that is, his own morrow. Lord Monthermer had been expected in February at the latest. He did not come till the middle of March. Such things may make a young man gray before his time.

Sitting in the little drawing-room before the fire, holding his wife's hand when she offered it to his keeping (but not seeking it), he used to expound his anxieties and to hint at his ambitions — but on these last, which were boundless, he was very reserved. She could only guess — and did in time come to know — how exorbitant these were: how they were the fund of poetry in him which every one of us has.

"Lord Monthermer," he used to say, "can save our unhappy country, and nobody else can do it. Of that I am persuaded. As our greatness has been in the past, so it must be in the future: an anointed king, a patriotic aristocracy, a loyal people. A wonderful order, as the Collect puts it in our ancient formulary. This dangerous and growing cry for Reform really aims, not at abuses,



She would press his hand, lean to him urgently and murmur her assurance

but at property — for how else are you to regard a movement which denies to persons of responsibility and influence the exercise of their just rights? Once give way to that, and throne and peerage, church and land — the very fabric of England — topple together to the dust of ruin. Anarchy must result — that is inevitable. You lay hands on property, nothing is sacred, for everything in this world is subject to the law of property. The home! The wife! The family! All these sacred things depend upon property for their privilege and sanctity. Miserable fools! They know not what they do.

"Lord Monthermer, born to rule, a natural leader of men, will save us: no other can. You will see, my love, you will be able to judge for yourself. His eye has fire — the fire of authority, born in him. He will return — none too soon — he will receive his warrant from the King; he will organize the loyal opposition — and he will choose his lieutenants. He will choose his lieutenants. He will need them. I can only say for myself that I shall be ready, when I am called. I have had warnings, as you know, and I have not been idle. That also you know. I am sure that my beloved wife will be at my side, when the time comes."

She would press his hand, lean to him urgently and murmur her assurance. They came to be to her — these sort of words — like a call to arms. All her guards turned out to their posts. And as time wore on, the hero returned, the dukedom conferred, the attack on Reform massed for delivery, and shock upon shock of assault made and re-made, although her slim sentinels were worn by watching, and the summoning orders for them became peremptory, petulant, fretful and wearisome, they never failed of appearance, but with the same urgency, the same warm low murmurs assured their master of loyalty.

For the fact is that Georgiana was to be two years a wife and one year a disappointed mother before anything happened. But what then happened was in itself a drama.

VII

THE PURSUIT OF THE EYE

LORD MONTHERMER came home, I say, in the middle of March. His great speech in the House of Lords was made in April. He received the thanks of Parliament, a pension and a duchy at the end of May; and not only had his eye not swept up Charles in its ranging search for a lieutenant, but it had swept up other persons not (in Charles's estimation) fitted by prospect, wit or ambition to fulfil that station. It had swept up Pink Mordaunt, an aging buck, well connected, once a Whig, an incorrigible gamester, a well-known Corinthian. [But Lord Monthermer's Corinthian tastes were equally notorious.] It then swept up Lord Bernard Wake, his lordship's own second son, a fine young man, a soldier, but (said Charles) without principle; and it swept up others whom it were tedious (as to Charles it was exasperating) to mention. Of all this our poor Georgiana heard more than enough. She burned with Charles, she grew white with his dismay — but she had now and then to flog herself to do it, for by the time these things happened her own little world was full. "Hints of joy, surmised bliss," were hers — and I don't know how much of her troublous time ahead was due to the way Charles took it. It is the fact that the one opportunity that the year showed of a recontre with Lord Monthermer was made frustrate by her condition. Charles was dreadfully vexed; but his vexation shocked her; and that 's much worse.

In April, amid all the fuss and flurry of the great return, she knew herself to be blessed among women. She hugged her bosom, she prayed by her bed. She walked her London with shining eyes. She caught herself standing here or there rapt in a soft air of wonder and expectation. She had not guessed, could not have guessed, what this common lot of her sex would mean to her. To have made a man — to have made a living thing — what the poet knows, what the musician, now she knew; and all great tradition, all religion, all Heaven and earth cried sanction to her deed; cried her holy, cried her blessed. For a week, for a fortnight she held her secret; then she whispered it to Charles and hid her happy face upon his shoulder. What were Lord Monthermer and all Parliament, what were the Treasury and all its junior lords, what were the Estates of the Realm, the hush of the Senate, the seals of office, the Great Seal itself, to the like of this? O happy, happy wife!

Charles received the news sedately, as his wont was, but with great kindness. He kissed her, he patted her shoulder, his hand touched her waist for a moment, lightly, then was withdrawn hastily, as if somebody had entered the room. But nobody had. She noticed that, even in the midst of her private tremulous triumph. It vexed her into inquiry. Was he elated? Did he share her elation? God knows. He was too kind by half: that 's the fact.

He spoke of the necessity of care, spoke of drafts and chills, wet feet. He spoke of the prudence of abstaining from entertainments, a prudence which he frankly admitted would be unfortunate "in the present state of our affairs"; advised frequent consultations with her mother, luckily at hand. He mentioned the fact that his own mother had had nine children, of whom three remained alive: in a word, he was practical while she was dreaming, he sat fast in his chair while she floated beyond him in an ecstasy. He had begged her to beware of chills — but her worst came from him. Yet he was only himself; he meant to be kind; and really, considering his pressing private anxieties about Lord Monthermer's eye, he said extraordinarily little about the inconvenience of a first season without his brand-new wife. For, you see, if the natural advantages of a rising young official can be enhanced in the ranging eye of a gallant chief by a young and very pretty hostess, it is a serious thing that she should be put out of action before the first engagement. That was a very serious thing; that cripples a young man. It was impossible for Charles Lancelot to conceal this altogether, though, as he was a gentleman through and through, he never once referred to it.

But, God bless the man, she knew! One slip — that guilty snatching away of his embracing arm — had opened her eyes. Now she saw. Now she could read him like a newspaper, pick out what mattered and leave out what did not. She knew, and knowing was at first disheartened, then, studying more deeply, dismayed, and then hurt, and then despondent. Her pride in herself threatened next to disappear; she struggled against that, and she struggled against other feelings, physical as well as mental. She fought gallantly for loyalty. She stood by him as long as she could: she attended his parties, she gave them; she jostled in crowds, hurried hither and thither, joining in the chase of him of the eye, who was now Duke of Devizes and went everywhere, or seemed to go everywhere except to just that place whither — poor little champion of a lost cause — she had dragged herself with Charles. The end of this sort of thing could have been predicted by a mother with humanity or a husband less self-absorbed. In July she fell ill, and had to be taken away. She was taken down to Thorntree by her Spartan mother, suffered horribly, lay in misery and torment (bereft of Charles, who must be in town) until the end of August. The child was born prematurely at the end of the month, born impossible, born dead. The one thing she prayed for then was that she might die also. But that was denied her.

Charles came down by flying post, and went to her. He fell on his knees by her bed; he sobbed; he took her hand and wetted it with real salt tears. But he had no words — or at least such words as he had were book words, without heart behind them. He had a heart, this unfortunate Charles, and kept it locked up like a skeleton. To such as he the heart is a stultifying, terrible organ, well placed and properly placed, in the very center of the frame of a man. It 's the only tolerable place for such an infernal explosive. Distrust it, says Charles, for it speaks by feeling, not by principle; distrust it, for it cries for what it wants, not for what you ought to appear to want. A man's reputation, a man's very honor, depends upon the figure he cuts in the outer air. But the heart cares nothing for his figure and is all for simplicity. Now, if you are simple, you will be taken for a simpleton. Can anything be simpler than that? This is the conviction of the Charles Lancelots of the world: upon it they live, and their wives perish of starvation.

As soon as she was well enough to sit up and see her friends, as soon as some faint flush of blood began to show again in her cheeks, this devoted Charles began to talk about the Duke. The Duke! And baby born dead! O hapless race of men! He had correspondents in all quarters, of course, and gave her all the news. The Duke, he understood, was to stay in Leicestershire for the cub-hunting. Now this was important; for possibly the Hodges might meet him. He might even dine at Rothley. Did not his Georgie think that a letter to Diana, giving news of her convalescence, might, in a postscript, hint—? She took the hint to herself, anyhow, and wrote her disingenuous letter. She went so far as to tell herself that anything is lawful for the man you love, and before she had signed it was convinced not only that she loved, but that she was interested. Generous creatures of her sort live upon their assumptions; and perhaps it 's as well that they do, seeing they have nothing else to live upon.

Shivering, therefore, rather piteously, Georgiana came back into the world of dukes and similar great affairs. But she came back different. There is such a thing as over-anxiety. Charles had wounded her, though neither he nor she knew it.

VIII

THE EYE CAPTURED

THE Mrs. Lancelot of a year later, the Mrs. Lancelot two years a wife, was a very different person from her of my recent exposition, that hesitating, wistful little lady of anxieties; she was more possessed, more reserved, much less given to enthusiasm. Her gentleness remained, with her childish contours — that adorable, round baby face which Gervase Poore, the poet, in his meteor flight across London, acclaimed as the Vision of Beauty, and those wide and wondering blue eyes which made her look innocent if indeed she were not, and bespoke for those who knew her best her absolute candor — these things remained to her. But her carriage was more definite, her expression was more set; she had composure, even aplomb. It was now or hereabouts that the word *statuesque* began to be applied to her by her admirers and friends — though she was more figurine than figure in the world.

But I have marked another difference by that sentence. She now had admirers and friends.

Admirers among the discerning she had, but very rare and respectful — men like Count Petersen of the Swedish Legation, whose habit of bowing to her first in a roomful alone betrayed him; admirers like Mr. Rogers, who laughed her Toryism to scorn, and called her "dear child"; friends only to call them so, for really she had no intimates at all, not a woman in all London with whom to be bosom to bosom. She owed this to her difficulty of utterance, and partly to her excessive anxiety to be liked. The defect and the desire often go together. But certain women took her up, and one of them was Mrs. Mayduke. She was an old friend of Lancelot's, but, oddly enough, though she knew the Duke of Devizes quite well, she did not guess at the secret of Charles's anxiety. Charles would have bitten his tongue out sooner than talk of his anxiety — not because he was ashamed of having it, but lest, having owned to it, he should afterwards fail in his quest. To be known to a Mrs. Mayduke as having desired and as having failed — oh, impossible! Yet, it was under Mrs Mayduke's auspices that the Duke and Georgiana first met. She was a merry, plump, roguish woman, with ample side-curls, very good-natured and very indiscreet. She made a fuss with Georgiana from their first meeting, and encouraged her young friend to unfold herself by unlimited petting and open-voiced admiration. She praised her figure, praised the gowns she clothed it in; she used to take her hand and, holding it, pick up her fingers one by one and cry out upon them. "Musical fingers, my dear — made for the pianoforte! How can you neglect the intention of Providence! I call it heartrending. With fingers like yours — what a touch! Or the harp? No, no, your arms are too thin. You want a great arm like Mrs. Jordan's for the harp — and a Siddons expression — Saint Cecilia, you know — the divine Raphael — the soul sitting in your eyes! Now you, Georgie, are too reserved — oh, by far! And your eyes, fine as they are — yes, very fine — are too busy inquiring, judging, watching, to have anything to say to the men. Mrs. Siddons, you may guess, has a great deal to say to them." So on she rattled; and Georgiana listened, and smiled vaguely, and sometimes blushed. But she liked it all the same. She liked to be taken notice of, even though it made her feel the more lonely. It shows how reserved she was that she spoke to nobody — not even to this ardent friend — of Charles's desperate Duke-hunt, nor of her nightly prayers for his good fortune.

Charles, in fact, was really growing gray with anxiety. His ambitions (the fiercer for their banking-up) devoured his vitals. He was very conscientious, and omitted no iota of his duties; but the strain on his concentrative powers was becoming too much for him. The fire had quite consumed what little demonstrativeness he had ever had. He began to brood over his troubles, never patted Georgiana's shoulder now, never took and stroked her hand. When she gave it him he held it limply, and offered her every encouragement to take it away again. He had grown very silent. Strange what a little they had to say to each other. They passed long hours after dinner without exchanging a word; and he had got into the way of discussing nothing with her but the merest details of daily life.

This was neither interesting to himself nor to her; she was now becoming a woman, this foiled young mother, and to a woman household cares became meaningless and irritating unless there is that within the heart which gives them sanction and reason.

But she had had so little from him at any time that she did not feel his silence as a change. Her call to love and cherish him remained as peremptory as it had ever been. Conventional or not, as it might be, she always heard it and never failed to answer it. Out she came, fully armed, to look all ways for that advantage of his which he, the fool, hid from her. Secretive by instinct, secretive by habit also, he was now concealing from her, too, how anxious he was, how inclined at times to despair; and while she knew this very well, she did not feel herself equal to the task of taxing him with his reserve or of dragging his reserves out of him. She had perhaps learned resignation since the loss of her baby. But she watched him closely, and suffered for him pure pity.

Meantime, the Duke of Devizes, howsoever carefully sought, remained close at hand, yet remote and inaccessible. He was often in the country, seldom in the House; but his appearances and disappearances alike were effective. On one occasion when there was a motion for Reform brought forward in the Lords, he appeared like a god from a machine and as good as directed their lordships to drive it out — which they did by an exemplary majority. He did his work with that bluntness, that absence of parade, that directness and that absence of heat which were habitual to him; and their lordships did theirs with as much enthusiasm as they were capable of. Riots followed at Portsmouth, Rochester and Southampton, the quelling of which in the last-named he personally superintended. His estate lay in Hampshire, and he was Lord Lieutenant. His popularity with his party went up at a bound, and that which he had in the country stood the strain. Charles Lancelot, his enthusiastic admirer, doted upon the possibility of serving such a man. So much he revealed to Georgiana, who hung upon his words. The Duke showed himself after this in London at one or two great houses, and was again a familiar figure in Piccadilly and the Park. At the opera he received an ovation, and saluted stiffly from his box, scarcely rising from his chair. This was a man! Lancelot reported the incident next day to his wife. She assumed it admirable, in such a man, though her heart sank a little as it listened. It was entirely counter to her own nature to despise people because they offered tribute. She remembered afterwards thinking to herself that she would have thought more of the Duke if he had been moved — say, to tears — by such a testimony. Later still, when she had come to know him, she had to laugh at the memory of such a thought. Tears and the Duke! She had been sure that she would have cried herself. Lancelot, however, saw nothing but character. If the mob, he explained, had execrated him he would have been as little moved. She had to own that.

The very next day, at a party at Mrs. Mayduke's, he was suddenly announced and walked up the room in her full view.

Sitting at the far end, she was aware, as by prescience, of an impending event. She saw men about the door stiffen and move aside; she saw deferential glances, efforts to be seen. Then a footman appeared, proclaimed him, and immediately behind him a spare, very upright man came in at the doorway (more completely at ease than any one she had ever seen before in her life) and gave two fingers to his hostess. Was *this* the hero who swayed a whole house of Peers? He looked like an elderly fox-hunter — with his shrewd, side-whiskered, humorous face, with his tended white hair, his color of burnt brick and his china-blue eyes. His dress, too, had that neatness and effectiveness combined which such persons have. A perfect Master of Hounds! And Georgiana, being romantic, had to explore diligently to find her food in this trim, little old precisian, whose every look and gesture was on the watch against emotion. She told herself that all this was studied, and found the absence of romance the most romantic thing about him. So she had once seen a North Sea skipper, in a storm which would have made the Corsair sing like a tenor at the opera, skirt the extreme knife-edge of danger without a wink of his eyelids.

She watched, with a high heart, Mrs. Mayduke's obeisance and subsequent effusion of welcome; she watched the dapper hero take it all for granted. She saw the cluster of candidates for recognition or presentation: men and women alike cast self-consciousness to the crowd. She saw her husband hover, saw him advance presently with a ceremonious bow, saw him recognized instantly, by a scarcely perceptible clearing of the strong face; she saw two fingers in white kid go out, and the thin lips snap out the words "How d'ye do?" She marked breathlessly what followed. Charles persisted, and the Duke listened while he looked quietly about him. His keen blue eyes caught hers, rested a moment and passed on beyond her. Georgiana had instantly lowered her own, but resumed her watch as soon as safety allowed. Charles then made his great essay. She could only guess at it by its sequel. He leaned forward and said something which certainly held the Duke's attention. He gave to it a lift of the eyebrows and a thoughtful gaze. He nodded shortly once or twice. To Charles's next proposition he looked directly at Georgiana and seemed to be reading into her beating heart. Then she saw him move forward, accompanied by Charles, in her direction, shaking off the pack of aspirants by some easy means quite indiscernible. Before she knew what was about to be she was receiving his presentation, his stiff bow, the scrutiny of his unassailable eyes, the good-humored but shrewd smile of his thin lips. His bow was extra-profound, semi-humorous in its ceremony.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, young lady," he said.

Georgiana was hardly mistress of herself, and murmured she knew not what. The Duke, who had no small talk, was by no means embarrassed by the lack of it, but continued his searching and benevolent regard of her face and form, as she felt, without seeing it. Charles, who was very nervous, plunged into conversation.

"Your words in the House, Duke, have encouraged all England."

The Duke laughed. "You pay me a bad compliment, my young friend. If I encouraged the Jacobins I must have expressed myself very ill, for example."

"A faction," said Charles, "a faction, sir."

"Not a bit of it," said the Duke. "It 's about half the country."

"The country will follow your Grace."

"H'm," said the Duke, "I don't believe it. The House of Commons won't follow me, I doubt. But I shall have Despard out in a month and then we 'll see." Sir James Despard led the Commons — a Whig. He dismissed the subject and turned to Georgiana. "Keep out of politics, my dear. It 's no job for a pretty woman."

"May n't I help?" she asked, half begging. She was elated by his evident kindness to her. At the moment she really thought herself a Tory, and burned to fight under his flag.

"Why, of course you may — and the more the merrier. But don't dirty your fingers. Leave all that to our friend here, and the likes of me."

Mrs. Mayduke swam up, breasting the air like a duck the pond. "Duke, I must take you away.

The Russian Ambassador is here and I don't know what in the world to do with him. He asked me for you the moment he came."

The Duke nodded. "I 'll deal with him. Come along, Mary. Have at him." He gave Georgiana his two fingers. "Good-by, my dear. Keep out of politics. Good night, Lancelot." He turned and followed his hostess, who had exchanged with Georgiana a merry glance for a scared one. It may be said of the younger lady that she had never felt so young in her life before. And yet the Duke did not give her an impression of age. He had white hair, it 's true, and not very much of that, but a young man's confidence, and a young man's bright eye. She thought of him as essential man, neither old nor young, but as that to which all youth tends, as that from which age declines. He was the zenith, but for all she could believe of him by hearsay or fancy had never been more, and could not conceivably be less.

Jogging home together in their hired coach she and Charles were very silent; but her hand very simply sought for his, found and held it.

Charles, however, was unresponsive, consumed by his dreams. To timid pressure accorded from time to time as her excited mind moved her to expression, he returned none.

A week or so later she and the Duke met again. This was at Lady Ogmore's breakfast — a Venetian *déjeuner* it was called; and if masks make a Venice, it was most Venetian. Lady Ogmore, the dowager, had a house overlooking the Green Park and gave great entertainments. She was the most fashionable person on Georgiana's visiting-list, and this particular party was very fashionable indeed. There were two Royal princes, and at least three great ladies who ought to have been nowhere, as somebody said, but in Bridewell. There were wits and dandies, poets and reviewers, as well as peers and politicians. Lady Ogmore, who aspired to be to the Tory party what Lady Holland was to the Whigs, went equally far afield and with equally Catholic taste herded lampooner and lampooned in one pinfold. Everybody was masked, and when the revels had reached their height all masks were taken off, to the confusion of some and the entertainment of the unconfused.

Georgiana, still very shy in a large company, clung to her husband's arm as long as she could. At the breakfast itself she sat between two strange gentlemen, one a great rattler, who made her laugh, the other a caustic commentator on the follies in which he himself did not scruple to share. In after days, remembering this feast, she was astonished at herself — not at what she remembered herself to have been, but at what she was then become, remembering it. She saw herself at the board, slim and pretty, and shy, in her pink tunic with its gold fringe and clinging skirt, with her hair twisted high in a Greek knot, to show the nape of her neck and finely shaped head. While she remembered, she knew herself still to be slim and very pretty (so much her modesty allowed herself, though her lovers called her lovely, and the newspapers wrote of "the beautiful Mrs. L——t"); but whence had she got her self-possession? Whence that quality which made her attention so extraordinarily worth having, which made her, it was said, the best listener in England? Certainly she had it not, as she remembered herself, at Ogmore House. Silence fell between her and the dandy, silence presently between her and the wit; and what covered her (as she afterwards blushed to remember) with confusion and despair was that these two eminent tongues presently interchanged sallies across her little tongue-tied person.

Isolation was thus branded upon her: she felt like a pariah-dog; and afterwards, when they were all out on the terrace, and the fun was faster, she was standing alone, rather rueful, and there came along Lady Adela Sparkless, a raddled lady, rather mad, with nodding plumes above a bleached head. "Ah, how d'ye do? Pleasant party!" she shrilled, and passed on, jerking her head like some foolish bird. Georgiana had advanced her hand, but Lady Adela in her flutter had passed it by. The poor girl felt deeply humiliated — and just then she saw the Duke come out of the long window. He had not breakfasted, was not masked, and was alone. Among the few unmasked were this great man and Charles Lancelot, an unelastic person, not lending himself readily to disguises, distrusting them. She watched him now as a refuge for her depressed thoughts; she saw him look about from woman to woman, a longer or shorter scrutiny as some turn of the head or contour of the figure took his attention. She saw him nod curtly to Charles, at hand, felt then his eye upon herself, and saw him, to her confusion, come straight towards her. She stood rooted, felt herself tingle all over, felt her heart beat, but watched, unable to move, fascinated to the spot. She was masked still; but he came directly to her, held out his two fingers and said, "Good morning, young lady. What, are they about to leave you alone?" He seemed as able to read thoughts as to pierce masks.

"I 'm a nobody," said Georgiana.

"Everybody is something to somebody," he said, and she felt the shaft of his keen eyes. They were, she found, of an intensely bright blue, the color of turquoise but with the transparency of the sapphire added. Her own eyes were called blue, but were really gray in the iris, gray shot with light and ringed with black. What ought to have been white in her eyes was blue. This was all of her that he could now see, except her beautiful chin.

"Everybody is something to somebody," he repeated, and then added, twinkling, "So now you know, young lady."

"You are very kind," she told him, and confessed to having felt stranded.

"Poooh!" he laughed at her, "that 's nothing to what I can do. You shall feel as floated as you please." He added, "I knew you at once."

She was really curious. "How did you know me?" she wanted to know.

He considered her calmly, most appreciatively, as he answered, "I can't be taken in by masks. They only hide the insignificant parts, the mouth, the nose. A woman may have these any shape and size you please, within reason. What you know her by are the eyes, the shape of the head, the way it is put on, and the figure. Most of all, I believe, by the shape of the head and the way it is put on the neck. That 's how I knew you. You have a long neck, and a very pretty one. Your head 's put on in the right way; it 's in the right place, and I 'm sure that your heart is. And I like —" He did n't add what he liked, but he looked it. Georgiana felt that she ought to have worn a domino.

He began to talk to her about her affairs; asked of her people, of her marriage, of Charles. Her marriage was dwelt upon: he asked questions about it — how many bridesmaids, how long a honeymoon, where spent, and so on. He did not seem interested in Charles, but owned that he was diligent and might be useful.

"He ought to think himself lucky," he said, "to have won your hand." She noticed two things about this grandee — first that he was fond of saying things to which it was impossible to reply; second, that he did n't seem to want any reply. At the same time he said them in such a way that they seemed natural. There was no sense of paying compliments about them. If he was gallant it was in a way of his own.

So on he went, and led her on to talk. She found herself opening out, and in time discussing matters of which he knew everything and she little or nothing. But he listened, he considered her arguments, met them. He paid her there the greatest compliment a man of many affairs can pay to a woman of none; he took her simply and seriously. Why he did so was principally because he was a man entirely without pretense — himself, for all his power and ability, quite simple and serious. Bores put him to flight, fops made him savage, witlings murderous. He was able to kill with a snub. With Georgiana he was perfectly charming; and he was charming because she charmed him. She had charmed him from the moment he saw her. He called her to himself a little slim fairy, a little sylph; and to him she was to be that (though he gave no thought to the morrow — less than she) for the rest of his life.

He was with her for the better part of an hour, and then the hoverers — whom he had had the power of keeping at a distance by a mere aversion of the head — took heart of grace from a study of his looks and closed in upon him. But before that happened Georgiana had unmasked, and he was able to reassure himself that her mouth and nose were by no means unreasonable. The nose was straight and fine, the mouth that of an adorable child. Her round face enchanted him; but he had often been enchanted, and neither lost his head nor turned hers in the search for it. In the face of the company he bowed over her hand and touched it with his lips.

"Good-by, my dear. I 'm glad that we 're friends." And then she fluttered away and sought her brooding Charles.

"Let us go, Charles, please. I ought to be at home."

"My dear, I have been waiting for you. You saw the Duke?"

"Yes, oh, yes. I must tell you."

IX

CHARLES ON WIFELY DUTY

SHE told him everything as it occurred, neither concealing her elation nor enhancing it. She was more surprised than gratified; she treated the whole thing as if it were a freak of fortune. Charles listened gravely, without letting one symptom of his mind be seen.

" He was extraordinarily kind to me," she concluded, " and really I was able to talk to him towards the end as if I had known him all my life. But I shall never be able to understand why he did it — unless it was because he is interested in you. And yet, you know, he said very little about you."

Charles, severely wounded by this, did not move a muscle of his face; but he inquired what the Duke had, in fact, talked about.

" He seemed interested in me," she told him, " and my opinions. Politics ! " She opened her eyes wide, and laughed. " Really, he asked me what I thought about politics. Of course, I told him. He is the sort of man one has to obey. And he was extraordinarily kind. He discussed them with me." She did not continue on this line, but broke off and chose another. "Charles, he means to hold office. He says that the Reformers will go out and we come in — but without an election. He will have a majority against him in the Commons, and govern with the House of Lords."

Charles nodded. "Yes, yes, I knew that. Did he express a wish — did he hint that I might find a seat?"

"No, he scarcely spoke about you. He said that he knew that you worked very hard. He said that you were a valuable — yes, that was his word — a valuable official. That is a compliment, from him."

"He is very kind," said Charles, who spoke for once as he felt — sourly, because he felt sourly.

But Georgiana resumed her speculations.

"He said that he knew me at once. But how did he do that? He nodded to you first, because I saw him do it. I saw him come in. And perhaps the sight of you reminded him that you were married — and — and — but even then! I was masked, you know!"

"Did you not ask him how he knew you?" Charles asked, and awaited the answer more seriously than his question implied.

"No, I can't say that I did, directly," she replied. "I wondered, of course. I wondered aloud, I mean. He answered generally — the shape of my head, and such things. He said that a mask only hid the insignificant parts." Her eyes fell — to wander over her pretty person, and perhaps to wonder. Charles glanced at her unobserved.

"And what did he think the insignificant parts?" he desired to know.

She laughed, blushing a little. "The nose; the mouth. He said that the way one's head was set on one's neck was the most striking feature of one's personality." More than that she could not tell him, or did not.

Charles was quiet for some moments. Presently he said, looking carefully away from her, "I am very much interested in what you tell me — naturally. I am, as you know, very much concerned. My hopes of advancement are centered in the Duke — and my opportunities of usefulness to my country will spring, if at all, from him. His eye, it has been freely said, is upon me. I don't hesitate to tell you so; it is right that you should know all. May I not expect similar frankness from my wife? I think so. It is not too much to ask."

He spoke constrainedly, veiling (as she thought) reproach. She leaned towards him.

"Dearest, don't put it like that," she said. "When have I not been open with you? I beg you to tell me. The mere thought of it makes me unhappy. Please to tell me what I have kept from you."

He was careful to frame his answer. Yet the man was galled in his pride. "Let me remind you," he said, "that Mrs. Mayduke is acquainted with my interest in the Duke, with my hopes from him. Yet I have only once before met the Duke in her house, until the other night when I presented him to you. Am I wrong in supposing that you asked her to provide that opportunity? Is it extraordinary if I wish to tell you that you have done me a service? May I not thank you for it?"

She had stared round-eyed — not at him, but away from him — from the moment that she caught the drift of this uncomfortable speech. Unconsciously, perhaps, she was prepared for it, not specifically, but by her general knowledge of Charles. Her answer was not natural — for her nature was very simple. She answered dryly, with a hard core in her voice.

"You are wrong. I have never spoken to Mrs. Mayduke about your affairs. I don't think that I knew — certainly I did not know from her — that the Duke was a friend of hers. I had no notion he would be there that night."

"I beg your pardon, my love," he said. "I beg your pardon."

Then she turned her looks upon him, quivering. "And if I *had* spoken to her — if I *had* asked her to let you meet him — why should you suppose that I had done it?" Her indignation transfigured her. She looked pale and tragic.

He was ashamed of himself, but could not admit it. He took up her hand and kissed it.

"To serve me, my love. Pray don't think harm of me." Her generosity flew to shield him.

"No, no," she said, "of course I don't. But you puzzle me. I do wish to serve you — it is on my mind. But it seems that if I had served you in this you would have been vexed with me."

"Never in the world," said Charles stoutly. He kept her hand; but no more was said. She dropped him at the Treasury and went on.

In the evening they dined together alone, with no reference to the morning's entertainment. She told him that Mrs. Mayduke had called upon her in the afternoon. He bowed his head, but said nothing à propos. He was by nature a deliberate man, with a dim sense of the rhetorical art. He had serious things to say to her by and by — but there must be due preparation — an attuned audience, suspense, then opening music — and then the actor upon the scene.

Mrs. Mayduke, it may well be, had forestalled him in the setting of his stage. She had certainly ensured suspense in his auditory, if not played the overture. She had swum into the little drawing-room unannounced, had taken Georgiana by the chin and kissed her roguishly.

" My dear ! " she had cried in her fat and knowing tones. " I congratulate you. A conquest! I saw it all. Never was anything so marked. He came on to the terrace, and went directly to you. Now, what had you done? Nothing, I am positive. Your mask was absolutely identical with mine. Besides — oh, preposterous! No, you dear little thing. He knew you by instinct. That is it — instinct. His eye, you know! His eye is proverbial. Through a haystack! What is a mask to him? Well, well, well — and who 's to say he 's wrong? Not I, indeed. Infatuated, they say! Believe me, I tell them, Monthermer knows what he 's about. No one better. I still call him Monthermer, you know. So old a friend. He 's Monty still — to his real intimates. My dearest child, you bewitched him! "

All this with Georgiana's chin in her fat and friendly fingers.

But Georgiana withdrew herself as soon as she could. She did her best to laugh her friend off, feeling that indignation was misplaced.

" He was extremely kind. Of course I was proud. He may be very useful to Charles — and I have to think of that."

Mrs. Mayduke raised her hands. " Useful, my dear! Charles's fortune is made. He will go further, let me tell you, than he can ever have expected; though, to be sure, Charles has always believed in his own star. So much so that I remember, when I offered to say a word for him to the Duke — Monthermer, as he was then — he refused me point-blank. Point-blank, my dear! And when I think "— here she clapped her hands —" that it was in my drawing-room you first met! I declare that I could go down on my knees. My dear, I must positively kiss you again." Which she did.

They sat together for intimate talk. Mrs. Mayduke expounded the Duke.

" I 've known him for years. He was a friend of poor dear papa's. They were at school together — at Eton, you know. Then he went out to India, having married that most uncomfortable woman, Eleanor Wishart; and papa died; and then I married. When he came back, a famous man and a hero, almost the first person he came to see was myself. And it has always been so, whatever he has been at — government, politics, diplomacy — he has remained on the same footing with me — a dear, valued friend. But, mind you, nothing more. No, no. We know each other too well. I 'm far from saying he 's perfect. As a husband, I know that he has been tried; but there 's much to be said for *her*. My dear, he is very fond of our society — he likes women. That must be confessed. He likes all kinds of women — everybody knows it, and he admits it himself. You 've no idea how frank he can be — oh, horrid! But a good woman — well, there 's no saying what effect a good woman might not have upon him. His guardian angel! Angels, we know, have no sex, poor creatures. They would be, as such, entirely useless in a case of the sort. Monthermer — I mean, of course, the Duke — despises men, though he uses them. He adores women, and they may use him, I believe — within reason. I know what a friend he has been to my Jack, and can guess what he might do for one whom he admired as well as respected — which, mind you, has never been the case with me. No, no."

Georgiana here, who had so far listened with murmurs, and her eyes intent upon her fingers twisting in her lap, interpolated a remark. She said, "I don't quite understand you. I am sure the Duke admires as well as respects you." Mrs. Mayduke tossed her head.

"My dear, I 'm nearly his own age. He is very fond of me. But admiration — no indeed! There has never been anything of the kind. And I am not at all the sort of woman he notices — in that way." She observed her friend's eyes, saw the iris spread, the pupils contract, and put up a fat hand. "Now, Georgiana, don't play the prude. There 's absolutely no occasion — and too much depends upon you. Think of our dear Charles. He must needs admire you extremely. His eye is astonishing — never at fault! And with his experience. Well, well!" She did not attempt to do justice to his experience, and perhaps thereby did all the better.

"The last person of our sort," she presently resumed, "who had any kind of effect — what one might call influence — upon him was a Miss Marischal. I don't know whether you ever met her; Flora Marischal, who married young Lord Bentingthorpe — a very cold beauty, tall, a full figure: your antithesis, my dear. He was prodigal to her family — oh, prodigal! Two commissions in the cavalry, and something for one of the others — something colonial, but extremely satisfactory. All the duties done by a deputy, who lived there, and had quite a small salary — a mere stipend. We used to call him the Curate, I remember. The climate killed him, of course; but they got another for the same money. But that was ages ago. Since her time — well, he has never been strongly attracted to any one. And God knows — God alone knows — what a comfort you may not be to him, my dear and noble friend. Georgie, a lonely life! My dear, you may be his Egeria — who knows? . . . My dear," she was at a loss —" there 's no saying what may not happen after this morning. I shall strongly advise Charles to look out for a borough. I hope you 'll do the same."

There was much more of the sort — Mrs. Mayduke was past mistress of nods and winks; but finally she kissed herself away, and left Georgiana pensive and perturbed, with glowing cheeks and bright eyes, alone with her thoughts.

They were insurgent, her thoughts. No woman, still less a young woman, least of all a young woman who begins to suspect herself of charm, can be offended to know of a man's admiration. Her husband's is taken for granted, or her lover's; but a stranger comes in with the added force of his strangeness; and when the postulant is a great man, the greatest man in England, a hero, the triumph is manifest, and the elation swallows up everything but the responsibility. And Georgiana, who was very simple, had no suspicions whatever. The Duke's simplicity was as plain to her, as hers to him, and as reassuring as he found hers charming. This hero, then, could detect her under disguise. Her person pleased him; he sought her, found her at once. It 's a testimony to her perfect honesty that her first proud thought had been, " I can tell Charles that he thinks me pretty!" She could enhance herself, you see, in her Charles's eyes, and perhaps provoke from her Charles a similar admission on his part. For Charles had never once told her that she was a pretty woman. That was not his way. He had assumed that among his many assumptions. She herself had supposed herself personable — but not pretty. It was only lately that she had begun to wonder. She had loved good clothes; but her delight had been in them, and not in herself as they displayed her. She had no vanity at all; but certainly she was pleased.

Then her responsibility; for that came washing up like a seventh wave to engulf her gratification. It sobered her excitement also. How far could she serve Charles? Surely, very far — for she believed in Charles. Within the gentle curve of her bosom she nested this thought: that she would mother her husband's future, and glean what she could from this fair new prospect of hers.

Last came — most sobering thought of all — her responsibility to him — to the hero — to this puissant prince who had discerned her fair and singled her out among the many fairer. Was it possible that she could be — what? "A comfort," said Mrs. Mayduke, and — Egeria! She, Georgiana Strangways, nobody, a shred, a fluttering scarf, to shelter England's greatest! Her eyes were starry, her color was high. She pressed her hand to her bosom, over her heart. Was it possible she could help him? Comfort him? Soothe him in his troubles? Oh, but woman should thank God for such glory vouchsafed. And that Georgiana very simply did.

She was restless until dinner time, but extremely happy. She caught herself looking at herself, smiling a little askance; she remarked the brightness of her eyes, the heightening of her color. Clearly color became her — clearly her looks were bettering. Pink must become her, since she had been in pink that morning and he had remarked her at once. But to-night she would wear white, and perhaps her color — Would Charles notice that her color was improved? Probably not. Poor dear Charles! and now she could really help him.

Charles did not notice either her gown or her heightened charms; but he did observe that she was vivacious. At the end of dinner, coming to her in her drawing-room, he sat by her, and took her hand.

"My Georgiana is happy," he said. "Her party pleased her?" She thrilled to his kindness, and snuggled her shoulder.

"Oh, yes, of course it pleased me. They were — he was — so kind. It was extraordinary!"

"It was indeed extraordinary," said Charles, with the blunt privilege of a husband — and she noticed that with a little smile. "Everybody remarked it."

"Did you like my gown?" she asked him with inconsequence, which startled him.

"It was very becoming. Pink always suits you." She shook her head.

"No, not truly. I am too pale for that color." So, artlessly she drew him on. He bent towards her.

"My love, your color is high to-night. My bride is happy." Then she put her face up to him, looking happy indeed. He stooped and kissed her; and while she leaned to him, her head on his shoulder, she whispered to him, with gleaming eyes of pride in her success,

"Shall I tell you what Mrs. Mayduke said to me this afternoon?"

"Tell me, my own, pray."

She must needs tell him now, but she could not look at him as she told. She watched her hand which his still held.

"She said that he — the Duke — was very much interested — that it was plain he really liked me. She told me that I might have a great influence — that I might help him. I could hardly believe it."

Insensibly Charles, as he heard her, relaxed his embrace. You could hardly have noticed anything. Put it that where he had held her before, now it was within her power to uplift herself from his shoulder. His arm was about her, but not to hold her. His hand held hers, but not to retain it. The suggestion, Mrs. Mayduke's, his old friend's suggestion swept over his self-esteem with a slight chill — just to ruffle the surface. That his wife, his chosen ally, his mate, should be an ally of somebody else, should help somebody else — and should be happy in the thought — happier, mind you, or first of all happy, in the thought of such helpfulness; well, that ruffled his self-esteem: that made goose-flesh. Must it always be so? Could no woman be found to give whole-hearted loyalty to a man? Was his case, then, no better than any other man's? He sighed, but she did not hear him, occupied with her thoughts and wondering.

" It would be gratifying to believe Mrs. Mayduke," he said — and did she notice the change of tone? " Of course one knows the Duke. He is partial to ladies' society. Naturally he has never failed of it."

Georgiana was now sitting up in her seat, and upon the clasp of her hand which he still maintained there was a slight strain. He continued:

" I should like, if you would allow me, to say one thing to you, my love. After this morning you will probably receive a good deal of attention from the world, which so far has paid you but little. We shall be asked out to meet the Duke. I fancy that so much may be predicted. I need not tell my Georgiana how important that may be to our fortunes, nor what part she may bear in them. A word from the Duke! based upon what he knows of my capacity and fitness for duty — his eye, we have been told, is upon my work. But I need say no more upon that head." Georgiana, slightly chilled, assured him by a murmur that he need not. He hastened on.

"The Duke's remarkable directness of statement may perhaps disconcert you; his keenness of observation need not. You have nothing to fear from his scrutiny. But let me warn my dearest wife of one thing. He has mixed in many societies and tasted of every experience which they have to offer. Many of these, perhaps most of these, will not appeal to you. Neglect them — even ignore them."

Georgiana opened her eyes. She was capable at times of a dry comment. "Do you think that the Duke is likely to put them before me?" she asked, and Charles was confused.

"He is curiously blunt. Much of his success in diplomacy may be traced to that. I need not add that I shall always be by your side in case you are puzzled —"

Georgiana observed his perturbation, and for the first time in her life with him criticised her husband. She seemed to find him both hot and cold. He was eager for her to improve this new friendship, and reluctant. He was making a fuss about nothing, and not making a fuss about something. They were at cross-purposes.

" Perhaps you would rather I saw very little of him," she said, but not as if she expected him to agree. Really, she said it to draw his protestations; and she failed. He sat for some time without answering, and she felt that his eyes were upon her. He neither agreed with nor disclaimed the suggestion. She was conscious of tension, withdrew her hand from his, folded it within her other, and waited.

The longer Charles delayed his answer, the more difficult he seemed to find it. Then habit asserted itself. When it came it was cold and measured.

" I cannot think that you, of all women, would disregard the interests of your husband — which are indeed your own. The Duke's friendship, countenance, patronage — why should I not say it? — would be of the utmost value. I might say that you would confer a great benefit upon me: I prefer to put it that it will be a mutual benefit. I believe that, given the opportunity, I can serve the Duke — if I did not, I would not ask you to stir a finger to help me."

He took up his book, with meaning, and settled himself down by the lamp. He usually read late.

Georgiana sat thoughtful for a while, shading her eyes with her thin hand. Then presently she got up, kissed her husband lightly on the forehead and went upstairs. As she left the drawing-room, her hand on the door, she looked back. He was reading, did not raise his eyes. She sighed, and went her way. He had robbed her day of some of its glory; but much remained. If she thought, undressing, of Mrs. Mayduke's words rather than of his, it is no wonder. But she did consider whether cards and invitations would follow, as he had predicted.

X

THE DUKE OF DEVIZES

MY grandfather, who died at eighty-five when I was sixteen, used to talk of "The Marquis" and "The Duke" of his youth as if they were two persons, whereas they were of course but one. "Ah, my boy," he would say to me, rubbing his cheery old hands together, "the Marquis was what we used to call a Corinthian in those days — a patron of the Fancy and a great hand at the cocks. I remember him on Crawley Down — sad days, bad days, my boy, happily over and forgotten. But the Marquis was a gentleman, and the greatest gentleman in England — not a doubt about that." He alluded to Lord Thomas Wake, you must know, who, himself the son of a Marquis, was himself made a Marquis for services of an indispensable kind, by the title of Monthermer; and finally, when he had returned in triumph from Cracow and was about to form his famous Cabinet to quash the Reformers, Duke of Devizes and a Knight of the Garter. Under this proud name and degree he fought more than one political Thermopylæ, was beaten, but survived, to be for twenty years more the greatest man (not gentleman alone) in England; and as such my grandfather would speak of him in another of his wandering moods. "The Duke, my boy? Aye, aye, I knew the Duke. I on my white cob riding to the office, and he on his white barb between Wake House and Downing Street — we passed each other every morning of our lives for nigh upon twenty years. He came to know me by sight, the greatest man in all England as he was. By and by he 'd look for me, and see me coming. He wore no glasses, mind you. And needed none. And stiff he was like a ramrod, sir, and high in the head — and saluted me, sir, as if I were his equal. For I always capped him, as we all did. Then one spring morning when the lilac was in flower, and the may, he reined up after his salute, and waited for me, looking at me with his eyes twinkling. 'You 're a punctual man, sir;' he said to me, 'you 're as sharp to time as I am,' said he. 'And I dare say, you are none the worse for that.' I told him that I got my clerks hard at it by half-past eight in the morning. 'And so do I, by God,' he said; 'and they don't like it, you know — and they don't like me either. They call me old Ironguts,' he said; 'and what do you suppose they call you?' I told him my name and that I had every reason to believe that they called me by it. And he kept his keen eyes on me all the time I was speaking and after I had said my say, and presently he says, ‘Do you believe that, sir? Then, by God, you 're a better man than I am; but you shall shake hands with me if you will.’ And I shook hands with the Duke, my boy — the greatest man in all England; and after that day he never passed me without saying, ‘Good morning to you, Mr. Hewlett,’ nor I him without my ‘Good morning, your Grace.’ That was a man, sir,” my grandfather added, “who served three kings of England and a queen, and served them, mind you, without bowing his head too low. For he was a great gentleman as well as a great man — the greatest in England.”

Thus, not once only but oftentimes, my grandfather who, like his two heroes, really one and the same man, was of the old school. How well my Lord Marquis of Monthermer fought his cocks or backed his champion, how carefully my Lord Duke of Devizes may have measured his obeisances to the crowns he served, I have my grandfather's word to go by; but of the cocks he set a-spurring, or the men, of what other bows of the head he may have made — this man and gentleman — of how he stood to his great, sparse world or of what he made of the little, pullulating, sweating and groaning world below his horse-hoofs — God may know, but not my grandfather.

God, who disposed this world in a wonderful order, may have seen no harm in its rule-of-thumb governance. Gentlemen must dine at eight, though the masses, unsupped, are at grips with the soldiery, though Peterloo at tea-time swims in blood, and Bristol City goes down in smoke to ruin — gentlemen must dine at eight and go to Lady Jersey's ball, or be seen in Lady Oxford's box; and so also must the particular pay for the general, and retail and wholesale balance accounts. Of this great, trim and stiff-shouldered Duke of Devizes there is more reckoning to be had than can be compassed by the phrases — he carried on the King's government; he was punctual at his office; told the truth, never paltered with himself, nor with the Crown, nor, "by God," with the vulgar. Was he a man, as well as a gentlemen? Had he bowels? A heart? Did he love anything but duty? Did he know what duty was? Was he happy? Did he make happy wife and child, mistress, maid and man? Did he look upon England as his chess-board, or Europe as his chess-board? Were yeomen-freeholders his pawns, churchmen his rooks, the landed his castles — and who, to be particular again, to be minute, who was his queen? All these things came upon me one day, and drove me to inquiry. This book is my report.

I find that as Marquis of Monthermer, and as

Duke of Devizes and K. G., he was a gallant man, as well as a hard one. In a coarse-pleasured age he was most coarse, in an age where success was the prerogative of health and high birth, he was very successful. In affairs of state he did what he intended, and if he got no thanks for what he did, it is to be remembered that he had never looked for them, and did not require any. In private life he had never known ill-fortune. He was born in the purple, and so could afford to take things as they came. And they came purple, as you might expect. Honor, power, dominion, respect, fear; all these things, offered without asking and taken without effusion. What else he got he got fairly, paying the market price. He got what he wanted, for instance, of women, paying for it freely (not always in specie), and taking it as it came; but I do not find that he got much joy out of it, or that he wanted much joy. Let me consider that closelier. In spite of himself, you may say, love was not unknown to this hard-featured, close-grained, plain-minded man: digging and groping, you come to a quick spot deep within his nature; you like to think that you are face to face with the infinitesimal soul (such as it is) of Thomas Geoffry John, Duke of Devizes and K. G. It is worth trying, at any rate; it is possible, after all, that he had a soul, and that here, in the thin hands of a woman, it has been casketed against the tooth of time. Applying the usual tests, this is my assay.

I explain his ascendency in the affairs of his country in this way. He had no imagination and no theory. Certain fixed ideas he had, which in the age when all ideas were in violent flux and commotion served him for principles. He believed that the sovereign was appointed by nature and secured by law to the possession of these realms and appanages. He believed that under him the aristocracy were agents of his will and profit. He believed that every institution by which, or in spite of which, England had become great would continue to keep England great. He believed in duty, and in absolute obedience. If the King told him to form a government, he would form one by all possible means; and if all possible means failed, he would govern alone without colleagues. And in spite of failure, rebuff, defeat, or ridicule he would continue to govern until the King told him to stop. The people existed to be governed, himself existed, under orders, to govern them; and the King reigned. Now, with these fixed ideas, with the army at his back, the departments under his eye, and the King in front of him, the Duke of Devizes would have been willing to direct the whole affair of the state from his seat in the House of Lords or his standing desk at

Wake House — or, for that matter, from the bay window at White's. And very well the country would have fared, no doubt, but for the circumstance that the people disagreed with him. The people had just found out that they were not there to be governed; they had a mind to govern themselves. They had convinced themselves of that, they had convinced the majority of their rulers; but they never convinced the Duke of Devizes, whose shifts, on that account (since he went on governing, under orders), were occasionally comic. Not to him — to him they were plain common sense — but to most of the people, and in time to the King. When that time arrived, and the King said his word, the Duke gave up the Seals with the utmost cheerfulness and retired to his pleasures and the routine of country life. But before it came he nearly had his head broken and knew it. He accepted that risk as part of the business of statesmanship.

His strength, you see, actually lay in his want of intelligence. He had a few ideas simply; the rest of England had many ideas diffusely. While his enemies were coördinating theirs he was applying his. And of course he was himself a strong man — never beaten, for he would not accept defeat; never tired; never out of heart; never out of work; and seldom out of temper. He was universally respected, universally admired, yet less beloved than many a less remarkable man. In some women, in a few men his great qualities led up to a sort of blind idolatry which showed his deficiencies as love-worthy; but by the great majority he was treated as an institution. Most men had the feeling for him which they have for the House of Commons, the Church and the Bank of England. They are old, they are weighty, they are respectable, they are dull. You might go to the poll for them, but not to the stake. They do not fire the blood, stir the pulse, make the heart beat. Nor did the Duke. Age, weight, respectability, efficiency he had; but he was cold-blooded, and he ignored the people. He had no enthusiasms, or if he had them, kept them under double lock; he had few affections, and those which he had were not those which appeal to the popular sentiment. His wife and he had a bowing acquaintance; he was on terms of club friendship with his sons, and used to write to his married daughter (whose husband he despised) as "My dear Lady Wendlebury." Even with the women of his tenderer relationship — and there were many — his attitude was that of cool companionship — so far as could be seen. The fact was, he distrusted enthusiasm as other men distrust the bottle. He had a notion that he might very easily make a fool of himself about a woman — and twice, at least, he did. Except on very rare occasions, when his sentiment overcame his caution, he held his mistresses at arms' length, and got as little out of them as he gave. He was a joyless man, as well as a griefless man — bleakly in the mean; a cold-blooded man; with sentiment instead of emotion, and appetite instead of passion. Yet, as I say, once and again the secret pool of his blood was stirred, and on the surge of its wave he could be carried to fantastic lengths of sacrifice. A strange personality — as strange, precisely, as any other human creature in this world, but no stranger. If one single man among the millions of us knew in and out one single other man, he would find that he was not the unique phenomenon he had always supposed himself. We are all odd fishes, I believe; and that 's why we shall never be socialists. Our nature is in the way.

Such was the Duke of Devizes, whose eye was now upon the Lancelots, or one of them.

XI

VAUXHALL

CHARLES, it seemed, knew his world while he contemned it. His prophecy came to pass. He had told his Georgiana that, after the Ogmore party, she would be taken up by the fashionables; and so she was. Chariots blocked the ways of Smith Square, great horses pawed the road before her modest dwelling. Tall footmen presented cards to the page-boy. Cards for drums, balls, dinners and routs came in. The thing was very real, it seemed; but Diana clinched the matter.

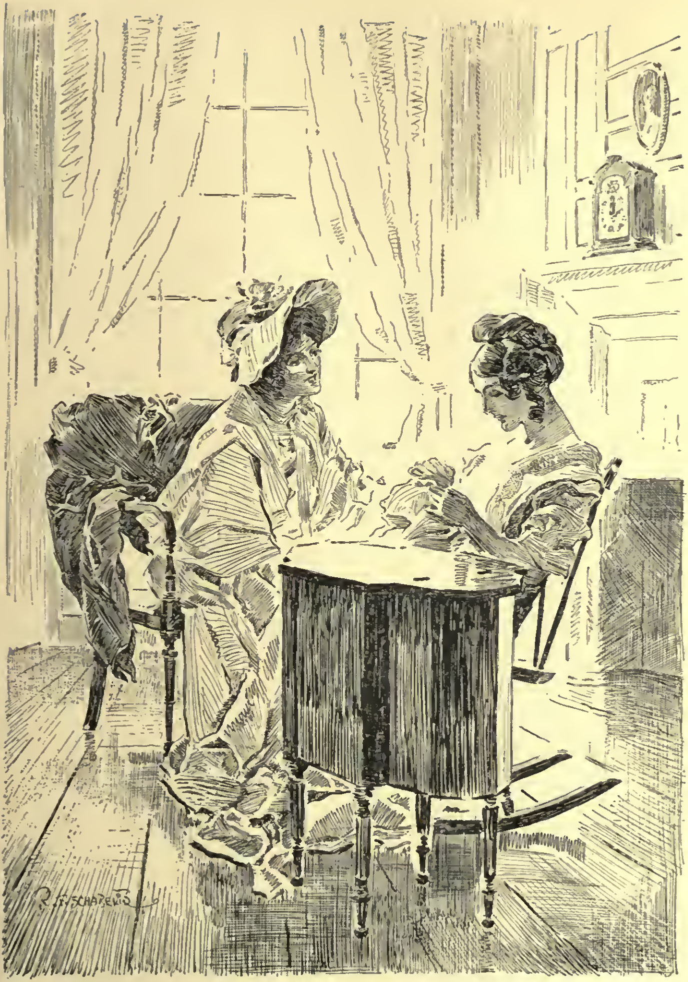
Diana, Lady Hodges, though she brought her husband up for the season with punctuality and despatch, had not so far seen much of her younger sister. She had made the mistake of neglecting what she did not understand. Clarges Street and Smith Square cannot live together, she had supposed, or could not, until Berkeley Square showed them how it could be done. But then Diana proved that she was open-minded, and generous also. She took her cue from Berkeley Square without any elder-sister sort of fuss. Two days after the Ogmore breakfast her dashing landau was at Georgiana's door, and herself hugging Georgiana in the parlor.

"My word, you little demure hussy! Is this what your quiet ways bring you to! The Duke, my gracious! It 'll be the King next — and then what will Lady C—— say? What on earth he sees in you —! You little quiet thing! And so you creep about, you mouse, and never a word to anybody; and you peer sideways, and you peer and peer! The greatest man in England — well, well! Carnaby came home and told me. All the clubs have it, my dear! I have n't been into a house since but what they were all buzz-buzz with it. And I come in on a side wind, as you may say. You 'll make me somebody. You 'll be the prop of your toppling family. Now I 'll confess to you, Georgie, I never expected it of you. You were always something of a mystery to me. You picked up Charles behind my back — now confess that you did. It was while I was being married — I was actually before the altar." Her roving but very kindly eyes surveyed the mantelpiece. "Bless me! All London on pasteboard. 'Duchess of C——; Duchess of N——. Earl and Countess of Portree; Countess of Morfa; Countess Tibetot; Marchioness of Kesteven; Mrs. Maynard — what! you 've Mrs. Maynard at your feet? H'm. That 's like the ex-Lady

Mayoress to the new one. You dear little sly thing, I must hug you again!"

Georgiana took it all in very good part. She and Diana had never been close friends; but much is permitted to elder sisters — and she was showing herself generous. Georgiana had no other means of knowing that all these grandees were to Diana, Lady Hodges, as planets to a firefly except Diana's own admissions quite freely made. The news did not exalt her, but she was quite ready to admit the excellence of it. All she could say in reply to repeated ejaculations of wonder was: "I don't know why he likes me. I can't think how he knew me." Diana honestly did not know either; but this was one of those cases where the more you are astonished, the more you may be pleased.

And then Diana came out with her proposal, not at all ashamed to let it appear that she was cultivating her little sister because she had become a personage, and because the friendly offices of a personage might be of use to herself. Sir Carnaby had obtained tickets for the Accession *Fête* at Vauxhall, which was to be to-day fortnight. They had room in the coach for two more. Would Georgie and Charles join them? The Duke was sure to be there, if one could only find him — but the crowd would be prodigious. Everybody said that the illuminations were to be



" Is this what your quiet ways bring you to?"

unexampled — Diana supposed because it would be the last time of celebrating the event. The fireworks would be given three times. Georgiana was quite willing: so the matter was arranged.

The great parties were attended, and Mrs. Lancelot received unwonted attentions. High ladies sat with her, patted her hand, kissed her at parting; high gentlemen paid her compliments as they circled or hovered about her chair. It was the proper thing, it seemed, to assume that the Duke was to be present at these assemblies, although in point of fact he was not present at any one of them. He was engaged, patently, upon the country's affairs; for the Ministry was beaten in the Lords upon a motion for Reform, and out it must go. Out, in fact, it went, and on the very day of the Vauxhall *fête* the Duke and his friends had been down to Windsor to receive the seals. Georgiana, following all this as best she could from the *Morning Post,* from Charles, from her friends, had no expectation of meeting him again, and told herself that there was no reason on earth why she should. "You 're a little nobody, my dear "— so she addressed herself in the glass as she made ready for Vauxhall, "and he 's England; so there 's no need for you to make yourself pretty." But she did it. She made herself as pretty as possible, in the light of another glass than that upon her dressing-table, the light of a pair of keen, bright blue eyes — critical, she felt, but very friendly. Her underdress was of pale blue, her tunic of spangled gauze. She wore a white and gold turban with an aigrette, and looked as much like a fairy queen, to him who had eyes for fairies, as is convenient for any young lady. Her eyes shone like black diamonds (for they always looked black by lamplight), and her color was that of a blush rose. To hide a small spot on her cheek (and for no other reason at all, she vowed) she wore a little patch. There was nothing for her neck: she had very little jewelry. Before she left the glass she just spanned that slim neck with her two hands, surveying herself, fingered the lace at her bosom and considered, was she getting thin? Already?

"I don't think I'm really very pretty. Charles has never said so." Her eyes narrowed and gleamed. She caught herself half-smiling, and then she blushed. The thought that sent her blood flying was, "But he knew me masked, and came to me at once." Then, quickly, she blew out the candles and went downstairs. Charles was waiting for her at the foot of them with her shawl. If he thought her pretty, he refrained from saying so. The carriage was, of course, late. They did n't start till half-past ten.

And then they had to drive back behind Pall Mall, along Jermyn Street, into Piccadilly to win a place in the string of traffic all set for the same place. The crush was great, the rate of progress tedious. They were more than an hour going through the Mall from St. James's to Queen Anne's Gate and so towards the new bridge. Charles was very silent, Sir Carnaby very jocose about Georgiana's conquest. Sir Carnaby was a heavy-handed man, and set Charles's teeth on edge with every stroke; but Georgiana laughed at him. She was very happy in her new elevation, not disposed to be critical. She liked enormously to be liked, she found out, and was grateful to anybody who liked her. But the unfortunate Charles contrived to make the journey seem almost as long as it actually was: nobody like him for stripping the nerves of their defenses. Diana, forever fidgeting with her person, pulling up her laces, patting her turban, folding and unfolding her shawl; wondering how late they would be, wondering who would be there, whether they would have supper, how they ever would find the carriage: poor, friendly, foolish Diana nearly drove Charles mad with irritation — which, when Georgiana perceived it, brought back upon her that sense of chill and disillusion he had provoked in her before. So the slow progress began to be irksome, and when, in the Bridge Road, they came to a halt, it was proposed by the incurably adventurous Sir Carnaby that they should get out and walk to the gates. Charles was against it, but was overruled. Georgiana was eager for it, Diana for anything that she had not been doing. Sir Carnaby was out first, and offered Georgiana his arm. "Come along, Georgie, I 'll clear you a way. We 'll give them a lead." He shouted a great "Yoicks! Hark for'ard!" and got a cheer from the crowd. Linkboys hailing him "my lord" bounded about. He chose the two biggest and off they set. Charles with Diana in charge followed, with protest in every stiff line of him — but lost them in a dozen yards. Drifting with the current, they came to the gates, where the broad stream must narrow down to single file. Never was seen such a surging mass of people. Georgiana, now pale with alarm, was all eyes for Charles. She was sure that he would be equally anxious, and, if anxious, then annoyed. He was always annoyed after he had been worried.

Sir Carnaby, however, would n't hear of stopping. To begin with, as he said, you could n't stop when you were being pushed from behind. These rascals would ride us down. No use calling 'Ware hounds! to them. He could trust Diana anywhere. She was a great-hearted girl, a bit of blood. No, no, he and Georgie would get on to the boxes. There they would wait, and all well. So it was to be. They reached the gates, showed their tickets, showed the others' tickets, and were in. By the light of the many colored lanterns, so far as they could see, the crowd extended. Away off behind the trees was the glare of the great orchestra and the centerpiece. Now and again a rocket writhed hissing up into the black and broke with a puff and rain of stars. The press was very good-humored, of every class known to London, higgledy-piggledy, — citizens and citizenesses, peers and their ladies, fast young men, ladies of the class known as Paphian. Sir Carnaby was enjoying himself, but Georgiana, though interested, was nervous about Charles, and could not.

Presently they met acquaintances of Sir Carnaby. "Well met, well met! Madam, your servant. All the world and his wife! Allow me to present you to my charming sister-in-law. Mrs. Damport, Mrs. Lancelot; Mr. Damport — by the Lord, Jack Damport, the very last man alive I should have looked for would have been yourself. And how 's Sherwood? And how does the hunt go? Oh, at Rothley, I can tell you, we have some bitches —" He was sincerely glad of his friends; he had dined; he expanded. But the crowd invaded him; a sudden rush scattered the party, and Georgiana, lifted off her feet, was driven onwards, alone. Like a leaf, flickering along with its fellows on the stream of an autumn gale, she went as she was carried.

At first she had no fears. She regained her feet, which seemed a great thing, and allowed herself to drift. One or two backward glances for Sir Carnaby gave her admiring eyes — not his — and warned her that she had better not repeat them. So she was urged forward to the entry to the great arena, and once inside that, with more freedom at her command, she selected a shadowed corner near the box-entrance where she could await her party. There she stood, a little serious figure — pale now, with great watchful eyes and her mouth folded into a bud — a trick of hers when she was preoccupied.

A jaunty creature in a high black stock — white-faced, greasy-haired, bold-eyed — was presently before her, hat in hand. His bows were profound. "Miss, your servant. Permit me to introduce myself — Mr. Silver, Mr. Frank Silver, well known at the Royal Exchange."

Georgiana stiffened herself. To bow or not to bow? Her head just moved.

Mr. Silver with a broad curve of his hand and hat together swept into the lists another gentleman.

"My friend Mr. Bagshawe, Miss — a good fellow, though slightly — yes, slightly — Corinthian in disposition. A dancer, Miss — very light upon his toes. May I hope for the honor of handing you out? Mr. Bagshawe will speak for himself."

Georgiana searched the shifting scene — but in vain. She tried an appeal.

" I am much obliged to you," she said. " I am waiting for my party. Please to go away."

Mr. Silver exchanged glances with Mr. Bagshawe; deep called to deep.

" Jack, what say you? Can we desert the young lady?"

" Never, Frank, while Britons rule the waves." Thus emboldened, Mr. Silver crooked his arm.

" Permit me, Miss, to escort you. Pray, oblige me." Georgiana's blue eyes now glittered.

" You are forgetting yourself. I have asked you to leave me, and expect it."

" Come away, Frank; it 's a lady. You 're putting yourself in the wrong." Thus Mr. Bagshawe; but his friend rushed upon his fate.

He advanced, all smirks; he was very near her. She felt his hot breath and shrank back to the wall. At that moment Mr. Silver felt himself seized by the coat collar, and became helpless and incoherent.

" You dirty scoundrel — out with you!" Propelled from behind, Mr. Silver lost his footing and his hat and was shot into the crowd. Mr. Bagshawe disappeared. A very tall and broadchested young man with a shock of tow-colored hair above a fine forehead, a flushed and rather scowling young man with a very red and full-lipped mouth, but with a pair of fine gray eyes, stood before her hat in hand. He was breathless with excitement and could not for the life of him speak.

"Thank you, sir," said Georgiana, her color high. "It was most kind of you."

The young man bowed. "It was nothing — I wish I had been earlier — to have spared you the sight of such people," he said. Then he bowed again and was gone. She saw him shouldering his way through the crowd, his hat still in his hand. While still looking after him she heard herself called —"Oh, my dear, I am so glad. What a time it has been!" Diana's voice. She turned quickly and was among her friends. There was Diana with bright patches of color in her cheeks — there was Charles biting his lip. There, flushed to a brick-red, but otherwise calm and frostily smiling, was the Duke of Devizes. She had seen him immediately and felt his appearance natural. She was simply and sincerely proud of him. Nobody else, she thought, would have appeared so exactly and promptly. The gentleman who had appeared still more exactly was forgotten.

He saved the situation, picked neatly off it any filaments of tragedy that may have been clinging to it. Two fingers to Georgiana: "What a scene! Bartholomew's Fair! Mrs. Lancelot, you would have renewed my youth if I had been a minute earlier. But I am grateful to your hero. Now let 's get out of this. I have a box, I believe." She thanked him with grateful eyes, lightly accepted by his, which while they saw everything, and were so understood by hers, appeared to see nothing.

Charles was now at her side. "My dearest, how terrible! I am thankful we have found you. If it had not been for the Duke's assistance we could not have been here. Duke"—and he turned—"let me thank you from my heart."

"For nothing, Lancelot. My luck holds, I see. It is something to be known all over London. Now, Lady Hodges, it 's your turn to be nervous. Where 's *your* husband got to?"

Diana laughed. "On Carnaby's account! My dear lord, not in the least. Carnaby will be dancing. We might go and look at him."

It ended in the same natural way. The Duke gave Georgiana his arm and strolled away with her, leaving the others to follow. No reference to her adventure, no gallant speeches, no professions. He began his quiet conversation where he had left it at Ogmore House. He was "in," he told her, for instance; had been at Windsor that very day. The King had shed tears over him. "Tom, Tom, are you come to save me? Ah, my poor country!" The likes of that. The fellow drank like a fish and distilled it quite naturally in tears. Now he was going to await events, and see what the other fellows could do. They had a majority in the Commons — true; but he would beat them in the Lords, and drive 'em to the country. He did n't think that they could do it. If they did —? Why, of course they 'd have to have it. But they should fight for it.

When she was quieter, he became more personal. "Why do you come to these things? You 're too fine, my dear. Why do *I* go? Because I 'm not fine at all. I like to see 'em at their beastly pleasures. I like to know all the world and his wife. You see, I 've got annealed. I 've been pretty hard hammered. But a girl of your sort — no, no."

She said that she thought it was going to be amusing. "Well," said he, looking down with a twinkle, "I 'll do my best for you. Now, let 's observe our company and talk scandal about 'em. Whom have we here?" He looked about in his leisurely, cool and quizzing way, as if they had all been marionettes jigging in a booth.

High and low, man or woman, he seemed to know something of everybody. A woman passed, escorted. "That 's Harriet Wilcox, that piece. Not in your country at all. A rogue, with the waist of a wasp, and the tooth of a wasp, and the temper too. The less we have to say about her, the better. The beau she has with her is Nevern. Fie Nevern they call him: his name 's Fyfield. I knew his father, who served with me in India and had two wives. Fine figure of a man. I 've known him to eat raw peacock at a pinch. Fie 's his son, a peacock too. Now, I know Harriet well enough. She 'll skin that lad — but we won't talk about her. You and she don't match." And so on — a peer, Lord Torbolton; a peeress, Lady Glentucket; a poet, one Tom Campbell, who to her was *the* Tom Campbell; with him another poet, a little merry obsequious man with a curly wig and soft brown eyes — who stopped, left his companion, and came up tiptoe, hat against his heart. "Another Tom Poet," said the Duke *sotto voce*. "We 'll talk to this Tom. The other 's an old bore." It was odd, how naturally he dismissed a man as "old" who was ten years younger than himself.

This second Tom could not be denied. His bow, his smile, his friendly eyes! "A fine night to your Grace! And an entirely fine night for your lordship's good eyes! What a scene for a statesman! Rest after your labors. Ah, now, give my poor friends a turn of rest."

"How do, Mr. Moore," said his Grace, and offered his fingers. Then, "Let me present you to Mrs. Lancelot, my friend and ally. A staunch Tory, Mr. Moore."

Mr. Moore bowed himself to a right angle. "The servant of Mrs. Lancelot, the humble servant. I had the honor of being at Lady A——'s two nights ago. I exchanged pleasant words with your fortunate knight. A serious conversation — the daughter of the house, Lady Susan, is about to make happy my friend Lord M——. We spoke, therefore, of Love and Hymen, a subject of which I know much, having a dear Bessy at home — and he too is an expert, as well he may be."

"What do you poets make of all this?" the Duke asked him, and the little man raised his hands and let them flack his sides.

"*Quicquid agunt homines!* My Lord Duke, these are the stuff that you and I alike work with. These fine fellows will be electors some day. They have to be fed: they love, they breed, they think —"

"Do they, by gad?" said the Duke. "Then you must feed 'em, I take it. That 's *your* call, eh? Well, give 'em wholesome food, Mr. Moore. Fudge is better for them than Miss Lalla. What do you think of *Lalla,* Mrs. Lancelot?"

Georgiana laughed off the confusing question, Mr. Moore helping her.

"Not fair, not fair, my lord. But I'll tell Mrs. Lancelot this. My Bessy hides it when some of her county visitors come."

"I think she's quite right," said the Duke. He dismissed the poet with a glance which nobody else could have detected.

"Now I must be after Tom Campbell," said the sharp-eyed little man. "A thousand pleasures attend your Grace. Mrs. Lancelot, may I say *au revoir*?"

"I hope so, indeed," she told him.

He hopped from one foot to the other, then asked if he might call and pay his respects. "It would be a real honor," he assured her. "I do hope you'll permit it."

She gave him a smile and her hand — which he fervently kissed. Then he skipped away.

"You've made a conquest of Tom," the Duke said, as she again took his arm. "But you're in conquering vein, I see. Who was your hero? — a fine young man to look at. He made short work of your two rascals."

"I don't know in the least. I'm very grateful to him." She remembered him now: a hot and fierce youth. His scowling brows haunted her.

"Your husband's coming to see me,"— thus he broke her the news. And then she looked up flushed and excited; and he saw her lip quiver. "Don't thank me, my dear. He's rather stiff, but he 's a worker, I know. I 've found out a good deal about him. He 'll do very well, if you help him, I don't doubt."

"I!" cried she, looking up into his face. He laughed kindly.

"Yes, you. You 've got keener eyes than he has. He 's too anxious to get on. He does n't see where he 's getting to. But you can see a line — and I 'll trust him to follow one. I would n't trust you — always. One of these days we shall have you a little Jacobin. Never mind. We 're going to be friendly. Now if I come to your door some fine morning, I suppose you won't refuse me? Well, I shall come. I 'm old enough to be your father, I daresay. Is that a bargain? Very well. Now let 's find your man and his party, and have some supper if they 'll give it us — and then we 'll tell Lancelot that he 's wanted. Come along."

Her little hand on his arm told him what he wanted to know. No happier feet than hers tripped the gravel of Vauxhall beside a manly pair.

Charles received his summons with a profound inclination. "I shall be proud to wait upon your Grace," he had said; and the Duke, "ten sharp." That was all. Going home, Georgiana was very ready to be stroked, and put out her hand as far as she dared; but Charles did not notice it. Full of his future, he sat well back with folded arms and peered out of window.

There was a block on the bridge, the first of many, and Sir Carnaby pointed out one leaning there, bare-headed, looking east. "See that man!" he said. "There's a suicide cut and ready."

As he spoke the ponderer turned and looked into the carriage. "Second thoughts are best, my young friend," said Sir Carnaby, as the horses jerked them forward.

XII

GERVASE POORE

THE young man on the bridge, one Gervase Poore, was he who had rescued Georgiana from her predicament in the gardens. He leaned on the bridge at that late hour, and saw what Mr. Wordsworth had not, who had done it on another bridge, but at much the same unconscionable time. Gervase Poore, like Mr. Wordsworth, was a poet, and like Mr. Wordsworth was not read by his generation. " Cockney School," said the *Quarterly* and other reviewers, and let their whips crack over his thin octavos. In his present vigil he saw not the mighty heart of London, for he doubted its having one; but he watched rather the great clouds roll out seawards, driven up on a wet wind from the west. " These," said he, " are messengers of the eternal and abiding things, at the gates of this brothel and madhouse combined. Or, London is like a great bird-cage. She, that innocent, gentle and single-hearted, is fluttering in there along with other millions. She can't get out — She 's at the mercy of any cold-eyed, rapacious brute who will get her into a corner. God in Heaven! and she is made of skyey tissue — made dainty and perfect, to be a true man's mate." And then he turned and, as chance would have it, saw the lady of his new adoration. He saw her clearly, recognizing instantly the turn of her head upon its slim neck, the roundness of her cheek; he caught a gleam of her liquid eye, fixed, it seemed, upon him — though Georgiana was innocent of his thereabouts and had nothing of him in her mind.

Although he was a poet and an ardent lover of women, having no conversation with man, whom he despised as heartily as the Duke of Devizes himself, or any other high Tory; yet he was an observer alike of what he loved and what he condemned. He was clerk to an attorney in Sergeant's Inn, and had it not been for the humors which that trade enabled him to study must have broken with his master years ago As it was, this faculty of his of reading, judging and pigeon-holing mankind, combined with the theory and practice of poesy, did contrive to keep him steady. Add to what he made, a fifty pounds a year which was what his father had left him, and you have all that you need know about him for the moment.

He had gone to Vauxhall on this particular evening to see women. His daily work showed him none; and women were entirely necessary to his moral well-being. Don't misunderstand Poore; he was not at all vicious. Far from that, any proposals in that direction would have hurt him dreadfully. But the beauty of a woman to him had a specific moral significance quite apart from any which she may have had herself. Beauty was holy to him; he said that if he was to pray he must see beauty. And that meant women, since Nature was denied to Londoners.

So it was that he saw Georgiana Lancelot, and while he adored her, finding in her "his soul's peculiar food," placed her at once. He knew her sort, he said to himself. There was a woman so innately pure that evil did not exist for her, could not for lack of nutriment exist anywhere near her. That was not one of your prudes by design, deliberately chaste, or chaste because chastity was an ideal. This woman was chaste by nature and would be so though she loved a hundred men or sold herself to a hundred that loved her. He saw her encounter, and saw that she was annoyed, but not alarmed "for her virtue." He saw that it was not conceivable to her that the fork-tongued, goat-footed kind could assail her for base purposes. Incapable of baseness, to her baseness was not. He adored her, as one might the lucent beauty of a star in heaven, or the cold young moon in a sky of clear amber. And at first he was not more troubled than she was.

But then, being now in fancy by her side, he was made angry, and anon furious. That they who were privileged to be about her should be insensible to her crystalline quality, that they should not discern the God, shocked him to the soul. He felt the blood surge up into his neck, his neck swell — which was a bad sign. Pushing a way through the drifting line of people, he did what became him, a Perseus without his Medusa head; and then, face to face with his young goddess, was himself turned to stone. Her clear and precise words of gratitude left him dumb. It was right that she should have nothing, or little, to say to the likes of him; but there was a flatness, all the same, about such an end to the adventure. He bowed and fled the presence; but gaining courage, stopped on the other side of the arena, out of her sight, and saw her with her friends about her. They borrowed from her an enormous, overpowering interest; they served about the Presence. He absorbed Diana, Charles, even whiskered Sir Carnaby; and then among them he saw one who made him hold his breath. So that was it! He knew that erect, thin, little great man; he knew — all London knew — those quiet and cold blue eyes. "So she 's shadowed by that old brute!" The sight of the man's possessory eye, of his proprietary greeting, turned him cold, then hot. He found himself trembling, and, unable to bear the discovery, pushed away. But Georgiana's slim and delicate beauty, her carven face, haunted him wherever he turned. Vauxhall became a den of thieves, a cage of vipers, and he had to leave it. He did, and leaned on the bridge for an hour or more, watching the cloud rack as it streamed up from the west and with all its secrets of the great open places hurried over London, urgent for the sea. To him, poet, these vaporous masses were informed with conscious life. They were winged spirits, messengers, angels of mystery — huge beings shadowing, threatening, warning, inspiring the minds of men, and why not indeed? How if the pathetic fallacy be not fallacious? How if the feelings we seem to lend to earth and sky be really borrowed from them? Thus he would have cried out, to whom the swift clouds were hierophants. Under them now he brooded upon their rune, and beside him, hardly shadowed now, Georgiana stood, but a transfigured Georgiana, a wide-eyed, ethereal creature, touched, she too, with mystery. This, again, was the informed soul of Georgiana, not that possessed, plumed and silken lady of the Vauxhall lamps, but the essential Georgiana. That exquisite being, it might be, was subject to the chill-eyed duke, at the bidding of other persons — statesmen, politicians, bucks and dandies. Be it so. He must be content to have it so. The essence loomed apart from them, close by his side. But now you will understand why, under some insurgent bitter gust, he likened London to a bird-cage, and saw Georgiana fluttering shadowed within it.

The second glimpse which he had of her in her carriage gave him better heart. The duke was not there. Thank God for a moment of respite! The men with her looked honest. One was, no doubt, her husband. He fancied, the younger man, grave, with dark whiskers. That he should understand her was not to be hoped; but he looked a gentleman. He strode homeward to his lodging in Clerkenwell with Georgiana as clear before him as a head on a cameo. He gloried in the possession, cherished and fostered it all he knew. For many and many a day she made his hours a waking glory. He triumphed in his discovery; he heard music all about him. And then he fell to upon a poem which was to get him a hearing. "Nausithoë" it was, which has since become known.

Nausithoë was a nymph of Proserpine's, flower-gathering with her that fatal morning on Enna, accompanying her, by prayer and entreaty, into the Shades, serving her faithfully there. They were bosom friends, those two, and might not be separated, it seems. There, in the nether world, she was beloved by, and fell herself to love, one of the dead, a pale phantom of what once had been a true man. They loved, they wedded, and an unsubstantial bliss was theirs, the very ecstasy of the love-torment, never to be sated without peace. All this, related in that supersenuous, hot-house manner which acted upon Quarterly reviewers as red pepper upon a wound, may be read in its place — but he gets Georgiana prettily into his octosyllabics.

> She, bosom's mate, the delicate,
> Child-faced, gray-eyed, of sober gait,
> Of burning mind, of passion pent
> To image-making, ever went
> Where wonned her mistress; for those two
> By the heart's grace together grew . . .

And then he hails her:

> O thou meek
> And gentle vision, let me tell
> Thy beauties o'er I love so well:
> Thy sweet low bosom's rise and fall,
> Pulsing thy heart's clear madrigal,
> Or how the blue beam from thine eyes
> Imageth all love's urgencies;
> Thy lips' frail fragrance, as of flowers —
> Remembered in penurious hours
> Of winter exile; of thy brow,
> Not written as thy breast of snow
> With love's faint charact'ry, for his wing
> Leaves not the heart long. Next I sing
> Thy thin quick fingers in whose pleaching
> Lieth all healing, all good teaching —
> For with them, touching discontent,
> I know how thou art eloquent!

He reads her here, from the without to the within, with remarkable vision; and throughout the poem, though he knows nothing whatever about her but what any man in the street might see for himself, he never gets off the track which she, in herself as she was, must needs have followed. Himself we surmise in Endocles, the ghostly lover. He has n't concerned himself to be precise with Endocles, whose trouble really was that he was only ghostly on paper. Poore was far too human. But Nausithoë, so long as she remained a lady in a book, was a safety-valve for much dangerous vapor.

Meantime he contrived to see her again — Nausithoë in her sweet tenement of flesh — and this by a very simple means. He devoted his evening hours to shadowing the Duke, guessing very well that to whatso great house he went the fair victim of his fancies would go also. It was not at all difficult to find out the semi-public, quasi-official engagements of so public a man; he had friends to help him too. Having tracked him down, then, to this house or that, he waited with the crowd there always is at the doors, behind the ranked footmen, until his lady should arrive or come out. He failed the first night, for the Duke went to dine with a royal Prince; he failed the second, for he went to a crib in Covent Garden to see a fight; but the third night he succeeded beyond his hopes, when his Grace went to Smith Square, and for a few moments appeared at an open upper window and stood there with Georgiana herself contemplating the starry heavens. She was then within speaking distance of him. He heard her actual voice, marked every little movement. Once she laughed, low and musically. The Duke said little, but looked (Poore judged) much. His carriage, waiting for him outside, took him off at eleven. Soon after that Charles came to shut the window, but she came up behind him, and put her hand on his shoulder, and presently leaned her cheek on her hand. Poore watched that beautiful action in a transport, and was furious with the man that he did not respond. But Charles held himself stiffly, and gazed into the night in silence. She said a few words, looking upwards at him; he answered in monosyllables formal and remote. For that Poore cursed him. "The Jailer" he called him, and in his bitterness, "The Eunuch of the Door." It was easy, after that, to find out that Mr. and Mrs. Lancelot lived in that house — far easier than to leave it. He did not in fact leave it until he had seen Mrs. Lancelot kiss her glum lord's shoulder and withdraw her white-garbed presence from the window. Presently after, when he saw a light above and guessed her disrobing, he lifted up his hands. "God keep her safe from harm!" he prayed, and went home to Clerkenwell.

The tortured pair, Nausithoë and Endocles, strained together in their empty rapture through two fervent stanzas before Poore went to his pallet bed. After this, he was seldom far from Georgiana's house after dark, and could have told you where she went and whom met as well as *The Morning Post*.

Sergeant's Inn claimed him by day. He could not guess the progress of the Duke's affair. And it 's well that he could not.

There is not much more to be said of him at this moment. He was twenty-six years old by the almanac, but hardly out of swaddling clothes by the computation of London. He was about to publish a volume of perfervid lyrics, and was known already to Leigh Hunt, Tom Moore and similar adventurers, successful and unsuccessful. Leigh Hunt printed him now and then in *The Examiner*, Tom lent him a guinea when he had one, and really believed in his genius. He was his own constant backer, and quite unmoved by the neglect or apathy of those who read him and those who did not. He was a violent reformer in politics, a born leader of lost causes. If Southey could have been made uncomfortable or Coleridge galvanized into mental activity by a revival of

Pantisocracy, Gervase Poore would have been the thaumaturge to have done it. He was probably the only pantisocrat alive; but he was an out-and-outer, prepared at a moment's notice to carry off a man's wife and, he believed, to share her spiritual perfections with Tom or Dick. This, I say, he firmly believed; but the fact of the matter is that if ever an occidental was born to be despot over a harem it was this young man. He adored women — but as a master; and it may well be that they would accept him on no other terms. But all this was pure theory, for he had known, so far, practically nothing of them.

Pray don't imagine that this was a virtuous youth any more than a vicious. He was not that, as the northern world conceives virture. His altruism was skin-deep, or tongue-deep, or pen-deep, if you like. In himself he was overbearing, presumptuous, impulsive and compulsive. He believed in himself and in nobody else; he believed in the right of the conqueror to the spoils, and in his own idea he was the conqueror. In the matter of beauty — which is the whole of the poet's matter — he had an eye for it, and a furious instinct to possess what he saw. The two things when they go together and with insolence make a Byron; but in Gervase, who had not the birthright of a Byron, they were tempered by awe. A very beautiful thing intimidated him while it drew him after it. He would not willingly hurt any beautiful thing, but if, without hurting it, he could have it — have it he must and would. And he had, perhaps unduly, the poet's faculty of persuading himself that never, never, never could he hurt the beautiful thing desired — in which persuasion, alas, he was very often deceived, and it along with him. For he had the tongue of an angel when he desired. Horrible failure, horrible disenchantment, horrible wreck impended and even came thundering down upon the fair promise which he had won by his words — times and again this happened. But after the dreadful affliction, and a time of blankness and eclipse, he arose like a giant out of sleep, renewed by contact with the earth, and saw, and persuaded, and conquered again — himself first, and then the lovely thing desired. And so from age to age he waxed, and each period was marked by a poem, and each poem sounded a birth and a death.

With the form of some sulky young barbarian of old, shock-headed, flushed, broad-shouldered and of gleaming eyes, with the swift discernment of an eagle and the ruthless dominion of some king of the forest, with the tongue of an apostle, and the pen of a prophet and the heart of a child — such was Gervase Poore.

XIII

REFLECTIONS OF A MAN WHO GOT WHAT HE WANTED

IF Charles Lancelot realized that he owed what he had so long expected to his wife, he was not the man to admit it, even to himself. His self-esteem was of that sensitive quality that it must at all costs be kept from the air. It is to be suggested that at the back of his mind knowledge of the truth was lying like a bruise, whose only hope of health lay in the feeling that if indeed it was so she had shown wifely duty by her efforts. And although he had made clear to her of what use she could be to him, and had been over-anxious for her " influence " to begin, now that it had indeed begun he could not bear to think of it. The moment he had confided in her he felt that he had betrayed himself, given himself into her little hands; and at that moment after the Ogmore breakfast, when she had made clear to him that her " influence " had miraculously begun to work, although he went on to improve the occasion, it had been with a sinking of the spirits, and with qualms which never disappeared, but struck suddenly at him like pangs at the heart. Such was Charles Lancelot, who felt with a dreadful certainty at the back of his brain that he was going to be jealous of his patron.

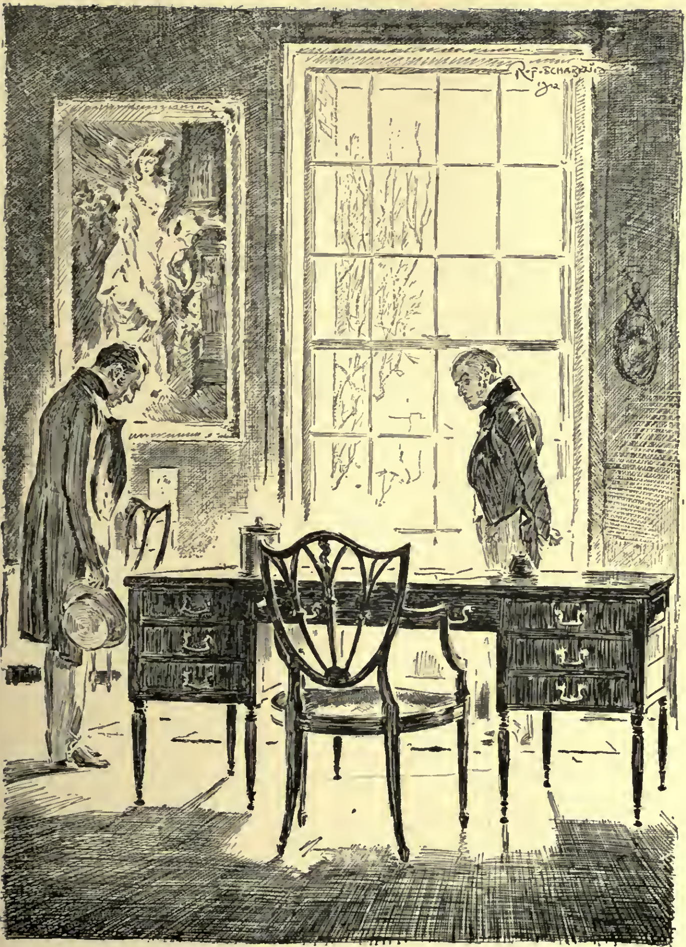
Not a word of Georgiana had, naturally, been said when he paid his visit to Wake House. He had been ushered into the Duke's library by his soft-footed man and had found the hero sunning himself at the open window, erect, fully dressed, unconscious of anything but the business immediately in hand. Two fingers for him: "Ha, Lancelot, how do?" — and then he had plunged into the middle of the thing, as his custom was.

"I think that you and I can serve each other. I 've had a note from Bamfylde"— that was the Secretary to the Treasury. "He tells me all I want to know. I 'm getting rid of Spendlove — not a scrap of use. The man has no method. Besides that, he talks. I gave him six hundred a year not to talk — and he talks. I gave him a horse, which he can't sit. Now, can you get into the House? What interest have you? Can't old Strangways do anything for you? He 's your father-in-law, I think?" That was the nearest they got to Georgiana.

Charles said that Sir Peter's borough was occupied by Sir Peter himself at present. He had hopes of one of Lord Drem's — that peer being a connection of his mother's.

The Duke knew Lord Drem. " Yes, he might do it, I should say. Do you speak to him — and so will I. We shall want all the men we can get if this damned scheme is to be countered. But they 'll have it, you know. They 're bound to have it. That 's what comes of putting ideas into English heads. It takes the deuce's time to get 'em there; but when you do, they root like couch-grass, and before you know where you are they 're part of the soil. I don't promise our people more than a square fight. That they shall have. We shan't stop in long, I fancy; but we 're in now — and by God we 'll have a go at them."

Charles said that he had great hopes in the English respect for property, which hitherto had always, ultimately, prevailed. He would have continued with his comfortable words, but the Duke shook his head. " They shall have a fight for it — that 's all I can say at present. Then there 'll be Catholic Emancipation to face. That 's involved in the other damned thing. Now, I 'd give 'em that if I had my way, but the King won't hear of it. What possesses him about it, I don't pretend to understand. Respect for his father's memory? That 's what he says, when he 's at his last shift. It 's unfortunate to respect your father's memory for one of the least respectable things he ever did — that 's all *I* can say. He let down Billy Pitt, you know — made the



"I think that you and I can serve each other"

fellow out a liar. Damme, that 's not respectable, to my way of thinking. No, no, the fellow 's got something else in his head. He shies at the Catholics — Lord knows why." Charles listened respectfully, not knowing then, what he was to find out before long, that one of the chief uses to which the Duke put his secretaries was to let off his spleen against his principles and party into their ears. The Duke was a Tory by inheritance; by conviction he was a despot. He loved work and showed that he could do it. He had never found anybody else who could do it half so well, and he was very unwilling to let them try. He could have got on perfectly well without a secretary; but he wanted Charles, for reasons of his own.

After a little more talk the bargain was struck. Charles was to have six hundred a year, and begin his work at once. He was to get into the House as soon as he could — the Duke thought that it might be managed in the autumn "if Drem was agreeable," and if "Drem's man" could be bought up. He thought that a baronetcy ought to do it. Directly Charles was in the House he would be found a billet, with what appertained. A man called Netherbow — Lord Netherbow — was Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, but he was in the Lords, and they must have a Commoner. Why should n't Charles take that?

Charles's eyes gleamed fiercely; he saw no reason why he should not, but contented himself with bowing his head. Well, we 'd see about all that when the time came. That which had, at the moment, to be made clear was what the Duke wanted of his private secretary. It was done with great precision. " You 'll be here every morning at nine, and have everything cut and dried for me. I ride at eight and am in by ten. At twelve I ride again — if I can. I take no luncheon, and go down to the House at four. You 'll have to come too, in case I want you — which I almost certainly shall. At eight I dine, whatever happens. Then I 'm out. I get home before midnight, and then I clear up, and get the slate wiped for next day. Now if I vary from that line of country I don't like it. I 've grown into it; it suits me; it will be your business to see that I don't get out of it. So long as I plug along in those ruts you may do what you please, see whom you please, and tell 'em what you please. What I tell you you 'll write, and what you write I shall sign. I think that 's all. On extraordinary occasions we shall have to do extraordinary things; but the less often they come the better I shall be pleased, and the quicker I get back into my jog-trot the better for the pair of us. Good morning." Two fingers, a sharp look, not unfriendly, a curt nod, and the thing was done. Charles walked back to the

Treasury for the last time as a clerk, and imparted his news to his Georgiana in the evening. She would have been more triumphant if he had. She would have been on his knee, with her arm about his neck, her cheek to his, or her lips, if such things had been in order. But they were not in order. They were inconceivable. The news was given through an open door while Charles in his room tied his neckcloth for a dinner party, and Georgiana in hers was doing her hair. They were, as usual, going into the high world, and had been invited " to meet the Duke of Devizes," the Prime Minister. And meet him they did; and she sat next to the great man, who talked to her through most of dinner.

Now began what you and I would call his infatuation for Georgiana, but what the London world which knew him called otherwise. He so impressed it that he was believed to pursue his fancy of the moment as Sir Carnaby Hodges and persons of the sort chased the fox, as it were by prerogative of birth, as it were *de race.* Sir Carnaby's pursuit was not called infatuation, but sport. The Duke's taste for young and occasionally pretty women (for by no means all his friends had been outwardly fair) was not called so either, but gallantry. To everybody who knew anything he was notorious for gallantry. He was a man of quick fancy, infinite zest; and what made him so attractive to women, his prestige apart, was the entire absence of pretense about him, which seemed irresistibly to imply sincerity. And no doubt but he was sincere. He never paid compliments, never flattered, never courted, as you may say. If he thought a woman pretty, he told her so without reserve. He had of course told Georgiana that she was pretty. "Fact is, my dear, that you 're an uncommonly pretty woman," he had said. He had neither made her blush nor her heart beat. She had no vanity, and did not believe herself pretty for being told so; but his way of saying it had helped her. It implied nothing in the way of desire for her good opinion; it implied nothing at all but what he believed to be a fact. "The fact is, my dear, it 's an uncommonly fine day;" it had that kind of effect. Georgiana, therefore, trusted him, as every other woman, object of his attention, had done before her. She really liked him, apart from the glory of him, and in time came to understand that it was honestly a comfort to him to have her ear whenever he chose for it. She was very happy when she came to understand that. That was flattery indeed. That made her glow with pride. And then it was such a comfort to feel that she was helping Charles. She always hugged that to her bosom. Sometimes she was pained that Charles was so cold about it. But he had never been very warm, nor had she as yet any idea how warm a man could be. Nobody so far had made love to her — unless you call profound bows, ceremonial attention to her needs or few words making love — which she certainly did not. Charles, if he had had love for her, had assumed it made, and assumed it accepted; the Duke (if he felt it) concealed it. She had no evidence that there was such a thing in the world, outside novels. And the worth of novels, said she, which exalt marriage to golden heights above the world, may be judged by marriage as she had found it. A business partnership, a social arrangement. What deeper significance it may have had, what private raptures, were lost in her baby's grave. She had put such wonder, along with her dreams, far from her. She believed that she was getting old; but two people knew that she was not. One was the Duke, who saw her with increasing frequency by day, the other Poore the poet, who seldom missed her by night during this season of June and July, while the malignant Whigs were holding the House of Commons against the Government of the day and starving the House of Lords of their proper food which, as everybody knows, is the rejection of Whig measures. This they did by the simple method of having no measures at all. But she knew nothing of Mr. Poore and his night-watches; and as for passion and gallantry, elopings and divorces and such like, she had an innocent mind, and would have classed the whole lot together as disagreeable.

The clubs called Georgiana "the Duke's new flame," and agreed that it was a neat-run thing for Lancelot. He, at any rate, had got what he wanted. "He 's been at it for years, I happen to know," said the ousted Spendlove. "If I 'd had a wife with eyes of that size I should n't be here." Spendlove felt sore.

Hostesses took notice of her more slowly, but as she gave herself no airs whatever, but on the contrary was most prettily grateful for attentions, she got off with very little scandalous comment. How these things are done I don't pretend to say — but it is undoubted that from about the beginning of July until the end of the session Georgiana was not only asked to the dinner-parties which the Duke had accepted, but was either taken down by him (if they were small) or placed in his neighborhood if they were big. Routs and assemblies received her gladly and saw her attended by his Grace as a matter of course. She went to Almack's, and so did he. But he never danced, and she would not. Charles, it is to be added, was always present. If she got notes of invitation which omitted Charles she always declined them. And she had the further delicacy not to mention them to him.

All this meant that they saw very little of each other — out every night, home late — Charles away to the Duke's by nine in the morning. What kind of a domestic life was this? Charles assured himself frequently it was not what he had sought in marriage — and never once saw how inconsistent he was, since it was precisely and literally what he had sought. Georgiana frankly found it all much more amusing than she found her own drawing-room with Charles in it, who had at this time the air of silent disapproval of her presences and absences alike. For if she chanced to be out when he came in, he showed her evident traces of suffering when she returned; and if she were in he was unhappy that he could n't make her happier, and showed that too. All this got on her nerves, caused her to be fretful, and tempted her to seek distraction outside.

I believe that the uncomfortable Charles suffered more at this dawn of his public career than he had ever conceived any human being could suffer. And he suffered none the less because he relished his opening vistas, and he suffered without renouncing any one of his ambitions now so well within his reach. Everything that he had desired seemed to be tumbling into his hands. He was to be a member of Parliament before the autumn, for Lord Drem's nominee was to retire with a baronetcy. He would certainly hold office when he was returned; he was bowed to at the clubs, elected over the heads of other candidates; his opinion was asked; he went everywhere and knew everything. The Duke had no secrets from him; but yet he believed himself betrayed. Not in fact, of course. It would have been inconceivable to him to connect her with anything like a scandal — impossible to suppose, dangerous even to think of. He respected himself; his security from tongues was the breath of his nostrils. And it would be false to say that he did not respect her also. He did, and so far as he could love at all, he loved Georgiana. But he was one of those Englishmen who believe that venerable ceremonies involve hearts and consciences. She was his by legal act, by Church sanction, by her given word and his acceptance. These laws of property are not broken: that is, they are in some cases, but not in his own. He was like any young, healthy man you please who believes that people die, without understanding that he too is one of such people.

But Georgiana's favor in the Duke's eyes, while it enhanced her in his own, seemed to make her unattainable. I believe that at any given moment of this time he prayed for a miracle, some angel of the Lord with a flaming coal which, touching his lips, might give him tongue to tell Georgiana how much he loved her. Absurd, unhappy man, he believed that he loved her overwhelmingly now, when he had found out that somebody else was attracted by her. He used to go apart at some great assembly or another, and with clenched hands and drawn face agonize in secret. He could not keep his eyes off her. He could not see her surrounded by men — as he must — without wild longing to snatch her out of all this splendor of silk and jewels and uniforms, ribbons and stars, snatch her away to some dark retreat, and there clasp her to his heart and kiss her to death. He believed that he would have done that, did not at all understand that what he really loved, what he really mourned as gone, was his love of her, his possession of her love, and not his possession of herself. He did not understand himself at all; he was alarmed, fearing for his sanity, had thoughts of consulting a physician. But so it was; and then, when the miserable affair was over, and he had her by his side in their carriage — for she had a carriage now — when she, fresh and happy from a little success, breathed and thrilled by him, and he felt the touch of her arm, or even the wooing of her dear affectionate hand, wretch that he was, he was frozen, tongue and brain, heart and every member, and must answer coldly, and feel her retreat in disappointment. You may pity Charles, who had not made himself, and could not unmake; but you may well spare a little pity for her too, who only asked to be happy and to make him happy.

She would have told him everything if he would have let her, or if there had been anything to tell. But there was not. It was — so far — the simplest business in the world. Her new friend had found out that she could listen, and so he talked to her. Devizes was unapproachable by men, because he was born a despot and had come into his despotry. He was much clearer-sighted, had fewer illusions, and much more decision than any man of his time in England. That he saw, and that they felt. He had no prejudices of the mind, though he was full of instinctive prejudices, so to speak. But you could not get the better of a man who had no objection to a beating. It was nothing to him to admit himself wrong. He would do it in public or private without winking; but he would tell you in the next breath that he intended to pursue that very course — if he could — because he chose it so. He could only so treat his fellow-men because he had no opinion of them, and if he never confided in one of them, it 's not because he wished to conceal anything from them, but because he did n't think they were worth either confidence or distrust. That threw him much into the society of women, to whom he was also attracted by their sex. He had always had women friends, and had loved much. He was, probably, incapable of a single and life-long attachment. He loved many women, and in many ways. He did not, as yet, love Georgiana, but he knew that he was about to love her — and there was no earthly hurry.

Her reticence and frugality had attracted him from the first, as well as her beauty, which, though it was very real, was not of that flaming and compelling sort which anybody can see. It was quiet, sub-radiant beauty, like that of a snowdrop in a hedgerow. It needed discernment, and that he had. Exactly what had drawn Gervase Poore, the young man of virgin heart, had drawn this aging man of ripe knowledge of many women. A sweetly poised discretion, a delicate deliberation, the view in her of something innately pure, a quiet contentment with her heart's store, and a candor like that of a mountain spring. Delicacy was implied in every line and tone of her. She was nowhere redundant. Her color was faint, and so was the thrust of her bosom. She was not tall, she was not short; she was not bold, she was not shy. She laughed rarely, said little — but, by George, she was a good listener! That was what the Duke said to anybody who chose to hear him. He never concealed for a moment that he liked to be with her, that she soothed him — with her fragrance of tea-roses, and kind eyes the color of violets. What Gervase Poore would have said at this time may be read in "Nausithoë," which was mounting stanza by stanza to more than respectable length. Later on, when her parsimony stung him to madness, he was more reprehensible. Some of his poems about her —"To Propertius, for his Lute," for instance — pass the bounds, and betray an irritation which may be natural in a fine young man, but is not the less regrettable.

But the world was, as it still is, a gross feeder. If the dish is unspiced, spice must be shaken in at table. If innocence exists it is not our fault. Here and there, already, "guilty relationships" were read into what I have explained to be a very simple affair. All that had happened so far was that on most mornings in July the Duke, attended by a groom, rode up to Georgiana's door at half-past twelve. He knocked and was admitted without question. He found her in her drawing-room, either at embroidery or flower-painting, said, "Good morning, my dear," and sat by her. Then in his high-pitched, clear voice, in his dry, humorous-querulous way he began to talk of this and that — of his correspondence, of his King, of his party, of his duchess, of his sons or daughters — and she to incline her head to her work and her ear to him. At times, when he paused, or asked a question, she would lend him the unfaltering glory of her eyes while she considered the problem put to her. His own, which, though small, were of the brightest China blue, would in the meantime meet hers without a suspicion of underthought or an inquiry which was not that of pure comradeship. She would revolve his question according to her simple understanding; he would either say, "I'm glad you agree with me. That's just how I look at it. Damned impudence, you know," or if he disagreed with her he would quizz her. "You goose," he would call her. "Don't you see what the fellow's at?" The fellow might be the King, or his footman.

Georgiana had met the Duchess, had dined at Wake House in state and semi-state, had met also the two sons, that Lord Bernard whom Charles supplanted, to his great relief, and the eldest who was called Lord Warbridge, and followed the profession of arms. Each of these was older than herself, and she liked them both. They had their father's frankness and much of his simplicity. Whatever they may have thought they were extremely pleasant about it. Lord Bernard went so far as to say that she had done him a good turn. "You've supplanted me, Mrs. Lancelot, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you."

"I hope you are not accusing me," Georgiana said.

"Lord bless you, no. I am only putting the thing in a nutshell. Now I shall go my own way and vote for the Whigs. While I was his secretary that would n't have done. I mean that it would n't have done for *me*. I don't suppose that *he* would have minded in the least."

Georgiana laughingly agreed, and Lord Bernard shook his head as he repeated himself.

"You 've made an honest man of me, Mrs. Lancelot. I wish you could make Warbridge one too."

"Thank you for nothing," cried the other young lord. "There 's nothing the matter with me. I 'd rather remain as I am, unless Mrs. Lancelot will superintend in person."

"That would be very unpleasant," said Lord Bernard. "Besides, she 's got the parent on her hands just now."

"Really," Georgiana protested, "you make me too responsible."

"You 'll do it, you 'll do it," he told her, and Lord Warbridge added, "He 'll take it from you. You 'll do him lots of good. I believe him to be quite a wicked old gentleman."

All this was very amiable, and put her at her ease. But she had very little to say to the Duchess, or to get out of her — a tall, remote, far-gazing and very silent woman, who passed for proud. She was not so, but she was very much bored. She had never made the slightest attempt to interfere with her duke's actions, nor he to engage her affection. He had married her because he had undertaken the duty. He gave her fine children and then washed his hands of her. But they occupied the same house and met at dinner when they had company — otherwise they did not. They never went to the same parties unless there was a state affair toward. It was at one or two of such ceremonials that she and Georgiana had been together in the room, before the first invitation to Wake House was despatched. No introduction was made, but the Duchess knew all about the Lancelots, and wished them no manner of harm. Indeed, she liked Georgiana's looks, and told one of her few friends that she did. "If I don't mistake," she had said, "Tom has got hold of a lady. What he 'll do when he finds that out will be interesting — though I shan't see it." She believed herself stricken with a mortal disease, and was right; and she had the morbid habit of measuring its advance, and calculating upon it. She added after a moment. "But there will be something more interesting still — what she will do when she finds Tom out."

"My dear, the Duke's fascinations —!" her friend had suggested; but the Duchess would have none of them.

"The girl has a head, a heart and a conscience," said she. "Tom won't get any of them. He flatters women, and few of them detect it. This one will. He never touches a heart, because he has none of his own. As for conscience! He 's captured her imagination just now. She sees herself ministering to the hero, anointing his wounds, and all the rest of it. By and by Tom and her stick of a husband will let her slip through their fingers, you 'll see. She and somebody else will be soaring abreast while they are beating the bushes."

A curious prophecy. But the Duchess had the prevision of the departing. She knew that she was a dying woman.

After it, she sent, of her own accord, an invitation to the Lancelots to dine, and gave the Duke ample warning through her secretary. She never spoke to him if she could possibly help it. The Duke advised Georgiana to accept it, "like a shot." "She 'll be pleased, I may tell you, though she 'll never say so. I don't suppose she 'll speak two words to you; but you 'll please her. She likes you, I believe. And of course you 'll please me. You know that."

"We will certainly accept, Duke," said Georgiana.

XIV

FRUITS OF VICTORY

THE Duchess, with "I told you so" as her last word, died in November when Charles, with Georgiana to help him, was prosecuting his canvass in Huntingdonshire; a canvass, as Augusta Strangways said, which only needed a few electors to make it perfect. There were in fact about five-and-twenty freeholders, all tenants of the Drem estate and all put in possession of their duties by a letter from their lord. But Charles was a conscientious candidate, and too much of an official to omit any rule of the game. So he canvassed, and his ladies canvassed; so he made very dull speeches to farmers and their hinds; and when his Whig rival came down in a coach and made the best of a bad business Charles gave him a dinner and made more speeches, in which he referred to him as "my honorable and gallant opponent," in his best House of Commons manner. In the very middle of the fun a messenger came down riding post with two letters, one to him, one to Georgiana, both from the Duke.

Charles was summoned to him, point-blank.

"Dear Charles, my wife is dead. Come up to London and set me at liberty from a deal of hateful business.—D." Hers was longer, but no less peremptory. Charles, aware that it had come and conscious of its tenor, chose to ignore it.

He entered her bedroom, after knocking, where she was dressing for dinner, his note in his hand. He stood behind her where she sat with her hands to her hair.

"I beg your pardon, my love, for disturbing you — but my news is serious and important. I may have to leave in a few minutes. The Duchess is no more."

She turned her face to him and her candid eyes. "I know," she said; "he has told me. I have had a letter."

It was part of his dreary comedy to raise his eyebrows. "You have heard also? Ah! She was a sad sufferer. Poor woman! And he must feel it too — after so many years. More than thirty-five. A strange union — want of sympathy on both sides. Well! it 's not for us to judge them. I fear, however, that I must leave you."

She had now returned her face to the glass, and was looking at herself as she spoke. She was careful not to watch his reflection behind hers. "He wants me to go to him. He thinks I can be of use."

Lancelot had been prepared for that. He had schooled himself for it. He answered coldly. "It is not for me to advise. Naturally he would wish it, and naturally you would go if it were . . . but you will probably decide that in the circumstances it would hardly be . . . Perhaps in a few days' time." It was true that Georgiana had been prepared also. It is true that she had felt, behind her desire to comfort her friend, that she ought to wait some certain time. Nevertheless she was put out.

But she showed little sign of it. Her brow was quite clear. "I am sorry. It would have been natural to me to have gone with you. I should have been quite ready. But I see that you would rather not. I will write to him, of course, and give you the letter."

This was not exactly what Charles wished. "I fancied that your opinion would coincide with mine. The Duchess had never been . . . I hoped you would see that —"

She answered quietly — but he could detect asperity. "I see perfectly. I will write. Later on I will propose myself if he still wants me. Have you told the servants to pack your luggage? And the horse? You will ride, I suppose?"

"Certainly," he said, "I shall ride. Jonathan can follow with my portmanteau. Riding post, I shall be at Wake House before breakfast. I must see Wheeler about the nomination — and all must go as it may with me. I hardly think we can lose the seat. Wheeler will explain that plain duty calls me away."

She assured him that she would make all proper arrangements with his agent. Then he left her, and she immediately wrote her letter to the Duke. It was delivered unsealed into his hands, but he did not take advantage of his rights. In half an hour more he was on the road, leaving her unkissed behind.

Augusta commented with her usual frankness upon the events of the evening. "It seems to me that you have two husbands, my dear. That must be uncomfortable when they want you to do different things." She added, "I suppose they always would."

Georgiana, folding her thoughts within her bosom, as it were, with her crossed arms and hands clasped to her shoulders, pored into the fire. "I sometimes think that I have none," she said. Then a sigh escaped her, and she looked unhappy. Augusta eyed her narrowly.

"If baby had lived," she said, "you would n't have cared."

She raised her brows, but not her head. "Perhaps not. It is getting rather difficult. I have done my best."

"For Charles?" cried her sister. "I should think so. I suppose Charles is very proud."

Georgiana gloomed. "He won't talk. He won't tell me anything. He never has."

"He can't, I believe," Augusta said. "That 's dreadful for him."

Georgiana, herself more often tongue-tied than not, expanded a little now. "The Duke wants me. I shall go as soon as I can. He has a right to me — if I can help him."

Augusta wondered. "A right to you! Well, perhaps any man who wants one has a right. But will Charles like it?"

"Charles told me to be kind to him — from the very first. He wanted it extremely. He was always talking about it."

"Yes, yes," Augusta said. "But what did he mean by 'kind'? And what do you mean by it? And what does the Duke mean? Have you thought of all this, darling? Supposing that you all meant different things? I know what poets mean by it," she added rather shrewdly.

"The Duke is very fond of me, of course," Georgiana reflected (but aloud). "I can't help seeing it. He likes to talk to me. It has got to be necessary to him. And when he can't talk he writes. He writes every week, a sort of journal. But I assure you —

"Don't assure me, dearest. Assure Charles."

"Charles is most unreasonable. He is always saying that he trusts me — and then not doing it."

"I am sure that Charles trusts you, darling."

"I should believe that," Georgiana said, "if he did n't talk so much about it."

"Why does n't Charles resign?" asked the really very simple Augusta.

"Because he does n't want to, my dear," answered Georgiana, no less simply. "He is consumed by ambition. It 's the breath of his life." There was a pause between the sisters. "Poor Charles!" It was the wife who spoke. "It 's so hopeless. He will never be more than an official."

"Is it not early to predict?" Augusta objected. "You see, he has only just ceased to be one." Georgiana, white and vehement, replied,

"He has n't ceased. He never will cease. Do you think that an ambition can be gratified by help from others? He fixed his eye on the Duke from the beginning. And when the Duke saw me — and liked me — he fixed his eye on me." She drooped now; from a quivering shaft fired by the flames she sank to ash as her fire died down. "Poor Charles! I would do anything in the world — but it is quite hopeless."

Augusta peered, shadowing her face from the fire with her hand. "Are you still in love with Charles?" But Georgiana, whose eyes were closed, did not answer. Augusta was so dreadfully direct.

Charles Lancelot, Esquire, was duly returned for the borough of Saint Lo by a sufficient majority, and then Georgiana went to London. He received her with affection and thanked her for the help she had been. The Duke was at Wake House, quite composed, he thought, but alone. The ladies (his two married daughters) had been gone about a week. Lord Warbridge was at Mortimer Revel, Lord Bernard in Paris, Lord Henry had returned to Oxford. The Duke talked of going up to Knottingley, a place of his in the North. It would be necessary for Charles to be on the road between that and London pretty regularly up to the opening of the session. By the by, he had a note for Georgiana — from the Duke.

He slowly produced it from his breast pocket. Now she had been in the house since five. They dined at seven, and it was now a quarter to eight. She was annoyed, but said nothing. The note was sealed. The Duke had treated Charles like a messenger.

Georgiana broke, and read. It was very short. "So you are here at last. Look for me at noon as usual.— D." Her head was bent over it, the paper fluttered in her thin fingers long after she had mastered it. She looked at it while she thought. Should she or should she not show it to Charles? If she did, it would look as if he had a right to her letters; if she did not he would be hurt. And then — had he not a right? Very candid with herself always, she thought that he had. So she got up and brought it over to him. She put it in his hands and stood while he read it.

"You see what he says?"

"Yes, I see, my love."

Her irritation, which had been rising since the delivery of the note, now broke out against his impassivity.

"You can see that he is not happy. You can see that I have not been kind to him. I ought to have come up sooner. I wish you would be frank with me."

He made no answer. She continued.

"He has been a good friend to us. He has done exactly what you always told me you desired him to do. How far I myself have had any share in it you are able to judge. I did not seek his acquaintance. It was you who presented him. I have always done what you wished — and I do think I have succeeded. If I am any comfort to him I am proud to be so. I am certainly proud of his friendship. But for some reason or another the moment you got what you wished for from him you began to grudge our acquaintance. It would have been better if you had not introduced him to me if you are to be made unhappy by it."

Then he protested, but feebly. "I assure you that I am not unhappy. I cannot be surprised that he enjoys your society, seeing that I discovered, long before he did, how enjoyable it was."

"If you really think me enjoyable," she retorted with some heat, "it would be more agreeable to me if you sometimes revealed your thought."

"My love, my love," said the poor gentleman, "you are saying terrible things to me."

"They are more painful to me to feel than they can be to you to hear," she replied. "You act as if you thought I was doing you a wrong. You know quite well that I am not." He rose and paced the floor, his hands knotted behind his back.

"You mistake me, I assure you, dearest. Wrong and you are not conceivable partners. Let us not discuss these things. They are painful to us both. I have always admitted the service which your attraction for the Duke —"

She stopped him. "I beg you not to consider me as a lure. You introduced him to me; he finds pleasure in my society, and I am proud to be his friend. I don't think that you realize what you are suggesting when you talk of my attractiveness."

He was greatly disturbed. "You persist in misunderstanding me. You are very unfair. Let us stop this discussion." He took her hand. "Georgiana, dearest wife, let us not wrangle over this painful matter —" But she snatched her hand away.

"Painful!" she said. "Why should it be painful? Here is a friend of yours and of mine in trouble. He writes that he is coming to see me, and I tell you that I blame myself for not having gone to him earlier — and you talk of painful matters! You show me by that what your feelings are. Let me ask you fairly, Do you wish me to refuse to see him when he comes?"

"No, no, my love — no, no. God knows that I do not."

God knew what He knew. Yet if Charles could have said yes to his wife's question, and by so doing not have laid the ax to the root of his career, he would, I believe, have said it. But I don't know. Self-esteem is a kittle thing. By saying yes he would have confessed to his fears, and by confessing to his fears he would have revealed them to himself. That he dared not do.

The evening ended in silence. Each of them read. But Georgiana wrote a note to the Duke and gave it to the footman to put in the post. At ten o'clock she kissed Charles on the forehead and retired. Directly she was gone he put down his book and began to pace the room. He was alone with himself. He stood for some moments irresolute, looking at her miniature, which stood on the mantel-shelf. It showed her in a high-waisted white gown, and he read into it her divine far-gazing eyes, her late beautiful vehemence, and that forth-right direction, that unerring candor which he both dreaded and adored. A wave of great longing came over him, and from the moment that he hid his face in his arm he knew what he would do. When he raised himself again he was a beaten man. He looked up at his watch. He might go up now. He did. He stood for some heart-beating moments at her door, then knocked softly. She replied at once. He opened and went in.

BOOK II

EGERIA'S DISTRACTIONS

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

EQUIVOCAL ESTABLISHMENT

IN the late spring and summer of 18— and onwards for two seasons or more, among the walkers in the Row between ten and twelve there would be few fine days when you would not have seen the sharp, close-buttoned form of the Duke of Devizes, and upon his arm the small hand of her who was known as his Egeria, by the malicious as his Aspasia. He the ruddy and she the pale, he the precise of eye and she the thoughtful, they were the remarked of all, as much for their fame as for their solitary habit. For though universally saluted, though his forefinger was forever at the brim of his hat, and her inclinations of the head as frequent and more gracious, they stopped for nobody, and spoke to nobody, but paced their allotted number of times to and fro under the elms about the Achilles statue and then, at an exact hour, crossed the road and were understood to return to Wake House. Monsieur de Talleyrand, who knew what this sort of thing meant as well as anybody in Europe, who was often in Mrs. Lancelot's drawing-room at Wake House, and never failed to kiss her hand at a ball, met them daily upon their constitutional, but never intruded himself. Lord Petersham, fearfully scarfed, Sir Lumley Skeffington, nested deep in whiskers, and Poodle Byng, were among the walkers. Lord Drem, a fine red-whiskered dandy, who admired her enormously, and said so, and Pink Mordaunt, fat and exquisite, who adored her and pretended that he did n't, were two other frequenters of the Row, and contented themselves, like the rest of the world, with salutations from afar. Lord Drem said that, with his cousin Miss Chambre, who had never married, she was the most loveworthy woman he had ever known; but Hermia Chambre was all afire, he said (though never for him) and Georgiana Lancelot was ice to the world. Nobody seriously thought that she could love the Duke, though *his* feelings were undisguised, and it was supposed that she was kind to him. If she was not kind, then the *ménage* at Wake House was scarcely conceivable. For, said the gossips, she and Charles Lancelot had not much more than a bowing acquaintance in any case; and if the Duke was at arm's-length on that account, then you had the case of a young and beautiful woman deeply loved by two men, neither of whom could come at her. It was a clear case, said old Talleyrand, for a *tertium quid.* Such an one was believed to exist; but so far he existed *a priori,* or was living on air — for he had never been seen. Air too was apparently the lady's food: she ate hardly anything else, and certainly she was very thin. Noticeably so; yet none denied her beauty and a slim grace exquisitely expressed by her clothes. It was a day when clothes outlined the figure, a day for slim women, a day for Mrs. Lancelot, whose figure was likened to the warmth of an early spring morning, suggestive of beauty rather than expressive of it, wraith-like, ethereal, with a latent warmth tenderly veiled. Respected, admired, not loved, she was something of a mystery — or she would have been if the tone of her constant companion could have supported mystery.

She and her husband had now been inmates of Wake House for a year; but it had taken a year from the date of the Duchess's death to get them there. This was not the Duke's fault, who had broached the notion the first morning he called upon her after his bereavement — a morning when she, moved by genuine pity and affection, had allowed him to put hands upon her, to put his arm about her, and had suffered his lips upon her brow. The tears had been in her eyes — it had been a melting moment. "My dear, you 've been an angel to me; and now you shall be my guardian angel." That was how the Duke had put it — moved as none had ever seen him but her. She had leaned to him, half embraced, and her head had rested on his shoulder as she listened to his hint; but then she had quietly withdrawn herself, and he had not been able to get her so tender again. Without an apparent effort on her part, and in spite of every effort he could make, short of deliberate wooing (which she had the skill to prevent), she had resumed their old footing of intimacy without a grain of passion, and then she had explained that "for reason good" she could not consider any such matter as change of lodging yet awhile. "I shall see you nearly every day," she told him, "and when you open your house again you shall invite us, if you please. But I can't come and look after you yet, dear friend. I am quite clear about that."

"I suppose Charles won't have it," the Duke had said, with his usual directness. "Charles, let me tell you, is an ass. He don't know me — and that 's no wonder; but he don't know you either — and that beats cock-fighting." But he had made no further effort to persuade her. "Have your own way, my dear; I believe you 're happier so. But I 'm a pig-headed fellow, you know. I 've got you in my head — if nowhere else — and it would want an operation to get you out again. You don't want that, I hope? You don't want me trepanned? Very good, then be so kind as to tell your servant to let me in when I call."

So it ended for the time, and he served a year of probation faithfully. There were lapses, of course. The flesh raged. He told her that he was n't meant to be a monk, and gave her to understand how little of one he was. But he hardly missed a day of her company, and toward the end of his year of mourning, visitors to Wake House expected to see her as certainly as their host.

At the end of a full year — to a day — the Lancelots moved into their new quarters, without any audible murmurs from Charles, who, considering he was now principal secretary and as good as promised a lordship of the Treasury, could not really say very much. The Lancelots occupied a wing of the great house, with their own dining and drawing-room, a boudoir for her overlooking the park, a library for him, two bedrooms with dressing-rooms, a maid's room and "the usual offices." It was very comfortable. One thing Charles noticed, but as his wont was, said nothing. In Smith Square they had never given up their original habit of the nuptial couch. Here that had been provided against, and naturally by her. Now, how had this been arranged? To whom had she expressed the wish? Had she, indeed, expressed it at all, or was it possible that the Duke — ? Was it a *coup de main?* Here were questions for a husband.

Whatever it was, whoever had decreed, it was accepted and adhered to. When Augusta, who was now married to a Mr. Fitzowen, came to visit her sister, the young couple were guests of the Duke, and there was no question of shifting quarters within the Lancelot *appartement*. There was room and to spare in that huge house. Charles, after his wont, suffered acutely, but said nothing. He dared not face a rebuff; he dared not touch upon the subject; but he hovered about it and about, and loved her for the first time in his life, or thought that he did. He was outraged; his sense of property, sense of law were offended. He felt deprived, abandoned, and chilly to the winds of the world. Feeling so, he looked desperately back — to the days when without falter or question she had been his; he centered his affections there and longed unutterably to prove her what she had been then. If this was love, he felt it without a doubt, and the prick of it was so sharp that he lost all sense of the resentment which a man might naturally feel whose wife, without consultation, alters domestic arrangements which the law of England sanctions and defends. A little vehemence would have helped him; if he had thundered, he would have cleared the air. But he could not do that. Ruthless critic of himself, his greatest torment would have been that he had placed himself at the mercy of that merciless judge, that he had admitted to himself that his wife was doing him a wrong. And then he ran the gamut of feeling; first offended, then memory-stricken, now he began to desire her possession, and so conceal his desire, first of all, from himself. The miserable Charles!

The fact very simply was that Georgiana had by now discovered two things: that she did not love and never had loved her husband, and that the Duke was in love with her. Now the Duke in love was a different person from Charles in love. Charles in love expected everything and offered nothing. It would have been inconceivable to Charles that he, after marriage, should court his wife. Such a derogation from the marital rights would have opened a wound in his self-esteem which would have bled forever. He would have died of a decline. He would have seen himself despicable, and that would have slain him — a kind of suicide. For to his sort it does n't matter how many people see the derogation; it is enough that you see it yourself; and to do that one pair of eyes will make you a looking-glass. But the Duke was another kind of lover. He could bide his time, he could deny himself anything for the beloved, but not to see that which he longed for given elsewhere. She had known from the very first that her relations with Charles must change if she were to go into Wake House. Then why did she go thither? My belief is that she went partly because she wanted to — the idea of being at hand to look after this noble and true friend captivated her imagination; and secondly, I believe that she had already found Charles as a lover insupportable. It may be that she had begun to have ideas of her own on that matter. I have no means of knowing, but those are my suggestions.

She knew now, at any rate, that Charles loved her. That showed an advance in her realizations. It could be told, to one who had eyes to read, by a thousand little signs. But she thanked him for nothing, for she was clear-sighted enough also to see that it had never been in him to do so until she had ceased to need him; that what he loved really was himself bereaved. Here she was unfair, for Charles had always loved her after his complacent fashion, and loved her no more nor no less now than then — though expressing his love according to what he got in return. When he got abundance from her he went his way at ease; now that he got little he hugged his lean sides and shivered in the cold. But however that may be, she had nothing for him but wifely attentions, which were his to a punctilio.

Hers was an equivocal position, even for an age when equivoque was winked at. Nobody could have supported it better. Things were said to her, in all good intent, which, if she had understood the art of the leer, might have made her heart stand still. Petitions were made for her "influence"—"A word to the Duke, dear Mrs. Lancelot! a word from you!" Her simplicity saved her, and her eyes remained perfectly clear of sight. She was not so much indifferent to the world's opinion as ignorant of it, incapable of seeing it.

Was she happy or not? I think she was one of those women trained to duty to whom happiness means contentment and ease of mind. Happiness in the sense of ecstasy, of conscious communion with the spirit of Life, had never fallen her way. To most women that comes by love, and she had never loved. Charles Lancelot came a-wooing before she was out of the nursery, and we have seen how assumptions ruled. He had assumed himself desirable, she had assumed herself desired. Then duty stepped in with the command, "Desire him who desires thee; love him, honor, obey." The Duke came next — a god out of a clear sky, with friendship proffered. Duty said, "My dear, accept it gratefully. He, the world-famous, selects you, the little unknown. See how you will advance your husband; see what a glory to yourself!" She gave his Grace all that she had to give — all that she had not given over to Charles, and that included, although she knew it not, a portion of her heart. Loyalty she gave him, admiration, and the tender thought which all women can give, a portion to each, to everybody who comes to them with love. He, the trenchant, conquering male, with his clear eye and his blunt appraisement, wanted more than companionship, and on one occasion showed it her. Practically, on one occasion only. There came a day — it was when she had been in Wake House a month or two — when she met her danger face to face and braved it. (Nobody knew, least of all Charles, how neatly and how exquisitely she triumphed.)

It was Sunday evening; the lamp was lit, and she was at her desk letter-writing. The Duke came in; nodded greetings passed between the pair of friends. He went over to the fire and stood with his back to it, warming himself, looking curiously, sharply at her, with brows knitted over his blue eyes. She was conscious of his glance, looked up guardedly once or twice from her paper and found it still upon her. She ignored it as long as she could, and showed nothing of her mind. Her quill whistled on its way; she finished, sealed and directed. Finally, she had to face him.

"Why do you look at me so hard?" she asked him, smiling and inclined to blush. He continued his scrutiny, smiling.

"Do I offend you? It's difficult to see anything else in this room."

She looked about. It was all very pretty: an oval room in white, with panels of pale blue silk. "I should have thought there were many better things to see. It's sweetly pretty. I love my room."

"Glad you like it, my dear."

"Of course I like it. *You* did it for me, to begin with."

"Bless you!" he scoffed, nodding his head in mock scorn. "How many tomfooleries would I not have uttered to get you here! But you were very difficult." She appealed.

"Oh, no, Duke, really I was not."

"Oh, but you were, missy. You hummed and ha'ed. Now Charles was all agog."

She knew this to be very untrue. "Agog" was not the word for either of them. She rose and came slowly to the fire — under that other fire of his keen eyes. Her effort was to divert the current by degrees — to do so without seeming effort.

"I have always wanted to ask you — Is

Charles, are we — of any real use to you? You have done so much for us." But finesse is of little avail when your foe uses the broadsword.

"My child," said the Duke, "look at me."

She did her best — maintained it for some seconds. Then what she saw beat her.

"Don't you know that I 'm an old fool about you — hey? Don't you know that I 'd cut my hand off if that would serve you? Don't you know what kind of a woman I know you to be? Do you think I 've had to do with many — Good Lord! with *any* such before? How old are you?"

She told him, "Twenty-five." She was very much disturbed.

"Well," said he, "I 'm thirty-two years more than that, but I love you like a boy of your own age." And then he took her in his arms.

Lying there, close held, her forehead fanned by his fierce breath, she began her struggle. She fought stilly, without passion, without urgent entreaty, for her soul.

"Don't be unkind to me. Don't hurt me." He heard her say that. He pressed her closer.

"My own! Give me your lips."

She looked up at him. Her eyes were full. "Ah, my friend, don't ask it." He released her instantly.

"Do you mean that I was too rough with you? Then I 'm a brute. Did I actually hurt you?"

"Oh, no, no — not that. Not in that way."

"What was it then? Out with it."

"You hurt — you were hurting — my thoughts."

"Your thoughts, child?" She had the lapel of his coat in her hand, and watched her fingers playing upon it.

"My thoughts of you, I meant. I had such fine thoughts. You were hurting them. That was what I meant."

He smiled, but rather grimly. "Ho! I see. The ideal! I had my knife into that, had I?"

Her brows arched high. She nodded her head many times, sadly, before she whispered "Yes." The Duke bent himself to and fro before the fire.

"Don't be offended with me, dear friend," she pleaded. "You see, I could n't be here if I thought — if you felt like that about me. That would be wrong. You like me, I know; but you like me as I am. You don't want to make me unlike myself."

"Like me, for instance," he said.

She waved that away. "Believe me, that I value your friendship —"

"My love, say. Let 's have it all out, my dear."

"Well — whatever it may be, I value it above everything else. But —" and now she looked him straight in the face —"but I don't feel like that about you, and I ought not to. Will you forgive me for saying so?"

He frowned, was much put out for a minute, then he cleared his voice and said, "Give me your hand, Georgie."

She did without hesitation. He kissed it long, and still held it.

"You 're a little angel, my dear. I won't forget this, and I promise that you shan't remember it. I 'll get myself in hand again. I can, you know — and by God I 've done it before — more times than you might suppose. Don't give me up because I 've got a devil inside me. Give me the office, and I 'll knock his ugly sconce for him. But, bless my soul! if you threw over a man because of his devils, you 'd have nothing left but a nunnery. Now I 'm going to beg your pardon, and you 're going to forgive me, and we 'll be friends again. Is that it?"

"Of course," she said; and then by a natural revulsion jumped into his arms and kissed him. That he received exactly as her grandfather might. To her, at least, he was a very honest man. He lost none of her admiration, and did not for a moment suppose that he had.

Since then he had been all that she wished;

but examining her own heart in various spare moments after this scene, she wondered why she did not love him, and whether she was capable of loving anybody.

CHAPTER II

NAUSITHOË AND OTHER POEMS

THE ways of poets are past finding out, and arguing with them is idle; otherwise one would have been interested to know how Gervase Poore found time to follow the practice of the law to the advantage of his master's clients, to inform himself so perfectly into the habits of Mrs. Lancelot and her two cavaliers, and to compose the numbers which make up *Nausithoë and Other Poems*. Not only did he do so, but he found them a publisher by the friendly services of Mr. Thomas Moore, and received a reasonable attention from the reviews, and, in all, the sum of twenty pounds.

His talents were admitted, his *perfervidum ingenium;* but he was reproached for an undue warmth of expression, for a lusciousness of epithet. A critic said that he treated women as if they were fruit; another that his collected heroines were like odalisques within book-covers. Even his friend Mr. Moore reproved him. "You 're too warm, my boy. They 'll take it from me, but they won't take it from you."

"Because you make them cry, the women are on your side," Poore grumbled.

"I 'll not deny it," said Tom. "You 'll never get 'em by scolding. Besides — a plague! Are n't they darlings?"

"I have no notion," Gervase answered. "I only know one — and she 's a darling, if you will."

"And do you want to scold her, young man? You make her cry that way, but she 'll owe you no thanks for that."

"She shall never cry when I 've got her," said Poore. "She won't have time."

Mr. Moore looked at him quizzingly, and wagged his plump forefinger. "I believe you 're something of a Turk, young Poore. I shall set Bessy at you — for your soul's health. Now, when will you come down to Wilts and see my Bessy? Proud she 'll be — and we 'll have a great night. Maybe I 'll get his Lordship in to supper. You 'll enjoy him."

"I shall quarrel with him. No lords for me, Tom. I 'm not an easy drinker. I get too hot."

Tom ran through the thin green quarto, supping sweets as he went. *Nausithoë* was a little long for him; and he owned he had no taste for phantoms. "To set the dear girl cuddling with a mist-wraith! It 's too bad of ye, Poore.

But ye 've no conscience then at all. 'The little slim thing, gossamer-light '— a pretty line, a tripping, pretty rhythm. It 's better than my anapaests, and be d—d to you. I could never hit off octo-syllables. Here we are again:

She, bosom's mate, the delicate,
Child-faced, gray-eyed, of sober gait,
Of burning mind, of passion pent
To image-making, ever went
Where wonned her mistress; for those two
By the heart's grace together grew.

Young man, your authority for giving the Lady Proserpine a bedfellow?"

"Callimachus, Tom," said Poore before he drank.

"I overlooked the bard. I can't contradict ye — being a poor Grecian. But she 's a darling, this Nausithoë.

O thou meek
And gentle vision, let me tell
Thy beauties o'er I 've loved so well. . . .

And bedad, so you do, you rogue." Then he ran on:

Thy sweet low bosom's rise and fall,
Pulsing the heart's clear madrigal,
Or how the blue beam from thine eyes
Imageth all love's urgencies;
Thy lip's frail fragrance. . . .

Tu-tu-tu! This is a very pictorial piece, and I 'll warrant her true to sample. Now who 'd she be? Do I know her? Is there any more of her, after old Endocles has hugged her into a rheumatiz — ugh! You 've no heart, me boy. You 're no lover."

"I love her beyond music, Tom. She 's everywhere in that book — and I 'm going to send it to her — and tell her so, too."

Tom was turning over the pages. "She 'll take it kindly, if she 's as you make her out. Is she here, too? What 's this? What 's this?

> The thin Coän vest
> Folding that tremulous bosom, learn to sing
> Treasure more ample, treasury more deft. . . .

Fie, Gervase Poore! They call me Anacreon, but they 'll call you Propertius. Have you seen her, then, in a Coän vest? You 've had your *bonnes fortunes.*"

This Poore accepted with a grin. His friend ran sparkling on to the end. Then he declaimed:

> With what black juices wrung from Thessaly
> He stained thee, lute, with what of myrrh and nard
> She steeped thee; whatso thou hast learned of rite
> Mutter'd by witches' fire — come, where no fard
> Can thicken thy delight,
> Nor unguents make more bright mystery,
>   Nor unguents make more bright
> Her face, her eyes, her body, in my sight!

Boy, you 've venom. You can bite. What had she done to you?"

Poore was scowling. "Never you mind, Tom. I was in a rage, I admit. Sir, I howled, I tore my hair. But I felt better for it — and I should have cut it out but that it 's so d—d good. And she won't understand it, bless her pure heart!"

Tom shook his head. "She will do that. She 'll understand it. She 'll have it by heart."

"That," said Poore, "is how she 's got to have me — by hook or by crook."

"Leda 's a good subject —" The elder was back in the volume. "I thought of it myself — but I shirked it. Married man, my boy; and I read Bessy every line. Make that rule when you set up house with Nausithoë, or Cynthia — no, no, she 's not a Cynthia, I 'll swear; for you 're an honest boy for all your mountings — but I like your Leda, saving one bit that 's too free. Upon my Pegasus, too free. I should never have dared. You end well — you can do that. You prove yourself so. Any one can begin — but to end, ah! Now how long were you getting that? —

The swan that dies in music, other ware
(*O lucent stream that mirrors swan for swan!*)
For mating hath and mastery. Leda knew it
(The swan's wife!) for in time an egg she bare
Down by the sedges where her love began,
Twi-yolkt of perfect woman, perfect man —

Helen so rare imperfect man must rue it;
And as the sweet spring ran
She nested them, and he watched by her there.

"I got it in Piccadilly — whole — laid it like an egg."

"A polished egg — eh? Keats could n't have done that, the sweet fellow. He liked proverbial endings — ran sententious as he drooped. What is it? 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' tum-ti-tum. Yes, that 's a way. But I like yours . . . Here 's another:

"Oreithyia, by the North Wind carried
To stormy Thrace, think you of how you tarried
And let him woo and wed? Ah, no, for now
He 's kissed all Athens from my open brow.
I am the Wind's wife, wooed and won and married.

And you can put things with fine simplicity, my boy. Above, ye say —

"She bore him twins,
Zethes and Calaïs, in a rock-bound place.

I like that; I know that 's good. The most of us are too fond of confectionery . . . But you put your lady in queer conjunctions, truly. Here she is married to the North-east Wind. Worse than her ghost! What 'll they leave for you, my lad? And what 'll you be to her?"

"I 'll be everything to her, or nothing," said Poore, who seemed serenely positive about it.

Next his friend must know the lady, and after some pressing, finding out that she was of the great world, he was like a hound on a good scent and swept all the coverts in London till he found her. So he presently did with a whoop! and a "Tear him to pieces!"

Poore was now red and angry. "I 'll trouble you to speak with all respect of Mrs. Lancelot, Mr. Moore." The little Irishman laughed till he cried.

"Pooh for you, Mr. Poore. Your name may rhyme with mine, but yourself won't reason with me on those terms. Respect! And how should I not respect a charming lady, friend of so great a man as the Duke?"

"It 's not for that I should ask you to respect her — but for this, Tom, for this." He banged with his fist. "That, being his friend, inmate of his house with her dolly-stick husband, she remains beyond reproach, ineffably pure and holy."

"In a Coän vest, I think?" said Tom Moore quietly.

"She could wear less than that, and remain as she is. When Aphrodite came shining from the foam, do you think she gave shameful thoughts? Only to the shamed already."

Tom, who was arguing in the air, and only a strict moralist on paper, and then only occasionally, was now centered upon a much more interesting point. He loved to intervene. Could he serve his young friend?

"Listen here, my boy. I love you and will do you a turn if I can. Now what do you say? I am on visiting terms — I could make my bow to her any day of the week — or to the Duke, begad. His two fingers (and he gives no more to the grandest in the land) are mine when I want 'em. Now what do you say? Shall I ask leave to present you? Shall I do that?"

The young man frowned over the proposal and chewed his cheek. Then he tossed back his cloud of hair. "I 'll not go to her like that — I 'll do it my own way. Thank ye kindly, Tom, but I 'm minded to take her by storm."

"How 'll ye do that, my boy? You 're not Jove that I know of. Don't be absurd now, but buy yourself a pair of white kids and I 'll take ye to the ball."

"Oh, I 'll go to the ball with you, Tom, and shift for myself. I 'll not refuse a card for the ball. And I 'll tell you what you shall do for me — you 're a kind little man, Tom, and the best friend I 've got, I do believe. You shall take her *Nausithoë* and she shall read it. What do you say?"

"I say," cried Tom, "that you 've the damnedest impudence of anybody out of Ireland, and I 've a good mind to throw this pint-pot at ye. But I 'll do it, I 'll do it. I 'm an impudent rascal myself — and that 's how I get even with the aristocracy. For I know I 'm as good as any of 'em in my heart of hearts, d' ye see? by reason of me genius."

"And so you are, Tom," said Poore, folding his arms. "You and I will never bow the knee but to two things — Brain and Beauty."

"And brawn," Tom shouted, "and brawn, me little gamester! Brain, Brawn and Beauty!" At that moment he felt himself to be ten feet high and a very conqueror.

The tavern filled, and Mr. Moore, who was about to make his bow to a great lady and feared to foul his fine feathers with tobacco smoke, was in haste to depart. Poore accompanied him into the street. It was raining and the young man had no great-coat. "Let me take ye in me cabriolet," said Tom. "It 'll not be much out of me way. I 'm going to Holland House — but I 'm your man as far as Tibbald's Road."

"I 'm not going there, Tom — not for a long spell."

"Where are ye for then, bad boy?"

Poore said seriously, "I think that she dines at Lady B——'s in Arlington Street. I 've lost her entry, thanks to you."

"Me dear boy — me dear boy!"

"Not a bit, Tom. You 've done me a sight of good. But you shall put me down in Piccadilly and I shall see her *sortie*. She 'll be going to some great house or another afterwards, poor dear. She 's looking very worn. She grows thin, you know." He spoke in a hushed down voice. "Tom, I saw her collar-bones the other night, and they cut me to the quick."

"The devil they did," said Tom.

"She 's not fed, my man, she 's not fed. It 's monstrous — she 's being starved. I must stop it, you know." He groaned, threw up his head, then his arms, invoking the sky. "The rain comes down like tears. Nature pities us — the generous goddess. O God, Tom, O God — cry with me, O God — I 'm bleeding for her."

"Me dear boy, me dear boy —" Tom Moore had tears in his eyes. "And ye might as well be crying for the hidden moon. Here 's the shay. In with you."

Jogging over the cobbles the kind little Irishman kept his hand on the knee of his perverse friend and poured out his advice like water. "Now do be guided by me, Gervase; the road you take leads right to Bedlam. You 've a gift, you 've a fire, you 've a sincerity — you mean what you say, and you don't care a curse for the reviewers. You may be a great man, Gervase. Think of that now. And you throw it all to the winds for the sake of a little slip of a woman not so high as your shoulder. And she with two husbands already! O madness, madness! *Quem deus vult perdere,* bedad! What can be the end of it? let me ask you; kindly think it over, and I 'll be obliged to ye. D' ye know Lancelot? 'T is not a man, 't is an icehouse. D' ye know me friend the Duke? 'T is not a man, 't is a raging volcano. It 's between fire and snow she is, the little slim thing, as ye call her, prettily enough — oh, you 've the words in ye — and the music of 'um. And where do you step in, unless ye can souse the Duke with melted Lancelot? Is it that you are after? God 's my life, Gervase, it 'll be murder you 'll be making, bloody murder! Ah, now, let the woman alone. Make a wrench of ut, me boy. Come with me to Sloperton and see my Bessy, and play with the children. Make your pomes to their good little hearts. Why, why, it 's madness! An attorney's clerk, and the Duke's flame! Poet be jiggered. They don't know 'um in the *Morning Post.* 'Mr. Poore, who is, we believe, an attorney, yesterday ran away with Mrs. L——t. Gretna is the supposed destination of the retiring couple.' That 's how ye 'll be pilloried, young man." Gervase, his hat over his brows, had little to say; but God, it seems, had not given him his square jaw for nothing. At the White Horse Cellars he thrust his head out of the coach and stopped the driver.

Then he jumped out, but not before he had wrung his friend's hand.

"God bless you, Tom. You are the best little man in breeches that ever I met. Take her her book and tell her that her lover wrote it with his blood. I 'll see you again, please God, before you go to the west. Good night, my friend, good night." And he was gone. Tom slapped his knees, pulled up the window, and away. *Quem deus vult perdere,* indeed!

The grudged of the gods crossed Piccadilly and entered Arlington Street, where the carriages were already lined. They coiled down Bennet Street into Saint James's, and the block on the pavement was dense about the awning. Link-boys stood there restless, the footmen were lined up, and behind them a dingy crowd, wet, steaming and sour-smelling. Gervase insinuated his broad person by degrees into the midst, pulled his hat further over his brows and waited. The guests were departing already. Great names were bawled out into the street, and at every one a footman detached himself from his company, and a link-boy, eager for a copper, flew shrieking the name. A Royal Highness, muzzy with drink, came first with a cloud of witnesses about him: men talking loudly, half-contemptuous of their convoy, half-elated at the rank of him. Dowagers with daughters, uniformed officers, two Russian grandees in sables and great head-dresses, two pretty women in diamonds and feathers escorted by a purple-faced peer, some young men in long cloaks who pushed a way through the spectators. One of them butted into Gervase with a "Give way, my man"; but Gervase gave him the benefit of his shoulder without a word, and jerked the dandy's hat off. "D— your eyes, you booby! Don't you know a gentleman?" "D— your own, I do," was the reply, which the bystanders approved with jeers. The injured exquisite stood with his friends, meditating attack; but Gervase had turned his back, for "The Duke of Devizes' carriage!" was being shouted from the house; and "The Duke 's coming — look out for the Duke!" was bandied among the people.

Gervase, working his jaw, waited without a breath. His eyes were fixed upon the lighted interior. She was coming. He saw the eyes of the footmen turned towards the stairs. Then he saw her plain.

She came out on the arm of the Duke, whose white head was bare. He looked straight before him, carrying his head stiffly, and talked in his high complaining way. "I told the fellow that I could do nothing for him. Not in my county — had n't served with me or anybody I cared a snap of the fingers —" She was looking pale and preoccupied, was not listening: that he saw at once.

White plumes danced above her small head, and a glittering band of gold brocade held them, wound closely about her hair. She was cloaked, but he could see her neck — a line of pearls round her throat, and then whiteness, and the gleam of her skin. Ah, but she was thin, this guarded goddess of his! Her eyes were anxious — how large, how deeply blue! She turned her head his way. Vague wonder showed, vague suffering. It seemed to him that he and she gazed long at each other. His own strong color fainted, the mist came over his eyes, his lips moved; and the blood pumped up from his heart beat at the walls of his veins. She passed by; he could see her no longer. He ground his teeth together then and stiffened himself, clenching his fists. By God, by God, but he could take her now — And then, at the words, behind her and her escort, he saw Charles Lancelot come, tall and cold, with trouble on his brow. The husband and the lover, besetting her behind and before. What had they been doing with her in there? Where were they taking her now, these two? To what infamy? What would they do with her when they had her behind those great doors of Wake House, that opened in the midst like the two jaws of Behemoth, and shut upon her and hid her from him? Infamy, infamy! What a life for this lovely, hapless woman — with an ice-gripped husband and a strident, monstrous old lover, who lived shamelessly and laughed at himself for it! Did God live, and love His world, and this fairest of His creatures, and suffer such things to be? Was he, Poore the poet, to be execrated if he snatched her from this, and they, forsooth, to be honored for shackling her by the ankle and hoarding her for their vile or sinister purpose? If he kissed the light back into those glorious eyes, if he warmed those paling lips, if he renewed that fading form, if he gave her the power of loving — would that be a sin? Monstrous to suppose it, blasphemy against God, when they froze and stared her cold.

He heard cheers for "The Duke" as the great horses sprang forward. He saw the footmen swaying behind — janissaries, eunuchs of the door. He raised his fist, and from between clenched teeth cried curses upon these pashas who sat upon the prone bodies of Englishmen and fed on delicate flesh.

CHAPTER III

SHE READS OF HERSELF

CHARLES was upon her conscience, and her conscience fretted at her nerves. It 's no wonder she was getting thin. She was twenty-six years old, had been six years married, and four years a wife. Her only child had been born dead, and by her own act she was to have no other. And Charles, while he resented it deeply, made no overt advances to her. She discovered that she knew nothing about Charles. It was that which made her pity him. He had become a stranger, would have to woo her again, but must do so, she knew, fruitlessly, and would not, as a matter of fact, do so at all. If Charles missed his spring, he could not spring again. She felt that in various signs. He was now become outrageously polite: that was a sure sign in Charles. He had always been polite, but was now outrageously so. The business of this tore her to pieces and threatened her control of herself. When he sprang up — from whatever he was doing — to open the door for her, she could have stormed at him — a white storm it would have been, for he made her go quite cold. Yet she dared not hint at her distress, for it would have made him worse. He was so inarticulate, this unhappy man. To rob him of his form and ceremony would be to make him dumb.

He had always been silent, discussing few intimacies with her. His manner of dealing with such things had been by discoursing round about them. He had made homilies, and she had listened, ticking off the heads, that she might get them by heart. Now he avoided all such matters: their consequence, or their futility, it seemed, intimidated him.

But, while he was thus abstinent from reality, he became profuse in small talk. He gave her details of public life — veriest gossip — which sickened her of politics, and (if he could only have known it) threw her more often, for mere breathing-room, into the Duke's society. For the Duke looked on politics as a game to keep the groundlings busy while he, and perhaps a couple more, kept the King's government in running order. The Duke's mind may not have been of a high caliber — certainly he was no idealist; but it had a large outlook. Charles saw pin-points, loved minutiæ. Georgiana, who, like all women, was attentive to detail, like all women despised it in a man.

She had hitherto accepted the tory formulæ, as Charles displayed them, without a question. Under the Duke's influence she now began to dismiss them as of little account. Property, upon which the opposition to reform really depended, was sacred in the eyes of the Charleses; if you could take a man's borough or vote, you might take his land, or his wife. Robbery, sacrilege, the door open to Anarchy! So cried Charles. The Duke, however, admitted that you could take anything from anybody — if you could get it. His immediate business was to see that you could *not* get it. Meantime, there was the State, the body politic; which was a complicated machine running in conjunction with other European machines, or in opposition to them. Now, said he, this old machine has been got into a groove which suits it, which suits the mechanics, and does not hinder the great complexus of which it is a part. Europe understands us, and we Europe. We can get along with few rubs. But if you change the House of Commons you will have to make new grooves — which will take time; and not only that, but while you are making them your machine will be running eccentrically, running amok, jostling among other, stable bodies, colliding — in so many words, as he put it, this country will be at the mercy of any other which happens to have its affairs in order. That would n't at all suit the man who wishes to dine, in decent comfort, at eight o'clock every night. Therefore it must be stopped.

Here at least was a practical view of politics, and Georgiana, who had not the least suspicion that she was an idealist, jumped at it and spread it out like butter upon the hard biscuit of Charles's catering. It was capable of infinite extension, of course. She neither knew that, nor that it was the merest opportunism. She did not see that the Duke was the greatest Anarch in England, keeping the rest of us from Anarchy that he might so remain in peace and quietness. The advantage of his political philosophy to her was that, when the time came, she was able to shed it, like a shawl, by a jerk of the shoulders.

The Duke, plain man that he was, desired her, and showed it. But he had himself very well in hand, and was quite content to wait her convenience. She would n't — could n't — stand much more of Charles, he judged. Meantime Charles was useful — and she had something for him; not much, but something. He was able to be her constant companion, her benefactor, her husband's patron, to talk to her extremely intimately of his affairs, to show her nevertheless by every look that he coveted possession of her and her charms — and with all that, to claim nothing she did not choose to give him. He got all the pleasure out of all this that was to be had; and it was a good deal.

She gave him her hand, she gave him her cheek. She saw no harm in that. But she was able, by some unconscious hold upon him which was quite out of her recognition, to keep him there. After that one occasion when he had failed of an assault, he refrained from attempting her by any such means. But he talked — his frankness ought, perhaps, to have appalled her; but it did not. It interested her; she never replied to it in its own kind; but she listened. So far in her life, she had been a listener. She had listened to her family, to Charles, now to the Duke. None of them had ever stirred her into action.

But she was not a statue; she was become a woman; and the soul cannot thrive on listening; and if the soul grows thin, so does the body. She was now in her twenty-sixth year, a grave and guarded little person, serious and pale, with eyes so large and thoughtful that you might have supposed all the cares of the state to be upon her mind and conscience and that the Duke was enabled to carry them so lightly because she had allowed him to put them there. She said of herself, ruefully, that she was growing a dowdy; but Gervase Poore, who had quick eyes, thought that he knew better. To him she was the perfection of delicate and hesitating charm. The tremulous wonder of a spring morning was a favorite image with him; the first flutter of the light, the pensive gray and violet of quiet evenings.

One of his similes for her was the Hidden Rose, the frail, coy flower of the June hedgerow:

> More than those
> Enfranchised beauties her perfection shows
> Like a concealèd rose,
> But to the thickets where she lieth close.

This will do for a poet; but she was shocked at herself sometimes.

The fact was that she was starved. She was a woman of warm imagination, of generous impulse. She would live, as all good women live, by giving. She would give the breast; but she had no milk. For that she must be fed. Her body was starved by her starving soul. Gervase had often raged and torn at his hair as he sat in his dark lodging picturing her life. He was wonderfully accurate. He saw her with her husband at hand, busy with her own vague thoughts while he prated of this and that nothingness. He saw her with her cynical old lover, listening while he revealed to her his mind — and busy again with her pondered judgments. He saw her in her crowded and brilliant world, quietly beautiful among the flaunting, shrill women, dressed exquisitely, a thing of wonderful art — anything but herself. Deep in his heart he had her as she really was, a fairy-child, an elfin thing, at one with the loveliest of Nature's world, which is so little our world that the squirrel knows it more, and serves it better than the wisest of us. Gradually as he agonized, his strength of purpose grew — to take her out of all this, and set her free. "Cage-bird, cage-bird, I will open the door!" he sang. But to do that needed craft and a *savoir faire* which he was far from possessing. He bought himself a dress-coat against the Wake House ball, for which his good friend Tom had promised him a card. Towards this adventure he set his eyes, on it he brooded day and night. It grew portentous, waxing as he waned. As the time drew near his heart was like to fail him, so charged with fate did it now loom.

And the card came. "The Duke of Devizes requests the honor of Mr. Poore's company at Wake House Piccadilly on —— K — at nine o'clock." It had come; and the name of Mr. Poore was filled in by Mrs. Lancelot. Her pen had traced the words. He kept it for the rest of his life.

Mr. Moore, whose social instinct was so remarkable, had long before this paid his court to the new star. He had called upon her in Smith Square. He called again when she was installed in Wake House; and now, the ball in prospect, actually foretold in the *Morning Post*, he called once more. In his hand as he made his bow was a thin quarto volume. He found the Duke with her.

"Fair lady, I 'm a fortunate man! Duke, your humble servant."

"How do, Moore?" said the Duke, with one finger for the visitor. He did not like the little poet, but had he been his bosom friend he would have had no other greeting. The fact is, the Duke liked nobody. He had no natural benevolence. He could love, we know; but that 's a different thing. In his ordinary acquaintance he liked or disliked the things which people did. Above all he disliked a fuss; and Mr. Moore could not walk across a room without that. He felt himself in action, and could only be certain that he had made an effect when he had set everybody else making one.

The poet, however, made much of his finger. "Radiant, my lord! I am newly from the country, Lord Lansdowne having given me a seat in his carriage, and Holland House open to me for as long as I please. That great lady would have it so, and it was n't for me to deny her!" He turned to his hostess. "But yourself, fair lady? I need not ask if you are well. You are always well, as becomes one favored by the Graces. Now, lest you should accuse me that I come to your shrine empty-handed, let me unburden myself. Mrs. Lancelot, you have made a poet immortal!" He tapped the thin volume. "You are here, let me tell you, in a multitude of disguises."

She flushed with pleasure, opened her eyes wide; she laughed a little. The Duke watched her eyes narrow, and glimmer like stars.

"Really! Am I in that book? Poetry! Oh, do let me see. Nobody has ever written poems about me."

The Duke snorted. "Poems, my dear! Little you know! I've written dozens!"

She turned to him mischievous.

"Your poems! In blue-books! I don't like the binding."

"Match your blue stockings," said the Duke; but Tom protested.

"Fie, fie, your Grace. Mrs. Lancelot has no such pretensions. She wears her colors in her eyes. But let me show you the volume."

"Give it me, please." She took it eagerly, opened, bent her head and began to read in the middle.

"Your own, Moore?" the Duke asked.

"Never in the world!" cried Tom. "To begin with, it's too high doctrine for me, seeing I'm turned forty, with wife and bairns at home. This is a positive young rhymester flying at great game. And when he don't hymn our fair friend, 'tis all nymphs and goddesses —' all growing naked in the open air'! Ay! and a pretty turn he has at a couplet, the rogue! But a sad heretic, you know. He snaps his fingers at prosody. Base is the slave that scans, says he! And I say, That is mighty fine, me boy, but if they can't read ye they won't buy ye; and me friend John Murray will visit you with his displeasure."

Georgiana looked up, composedly. Whatever she may have read, she showed nothing.

"Whose is this book? Is it really intended for me?"

"Undoubtedly, ma'am. The young rascal 's inscribed it."

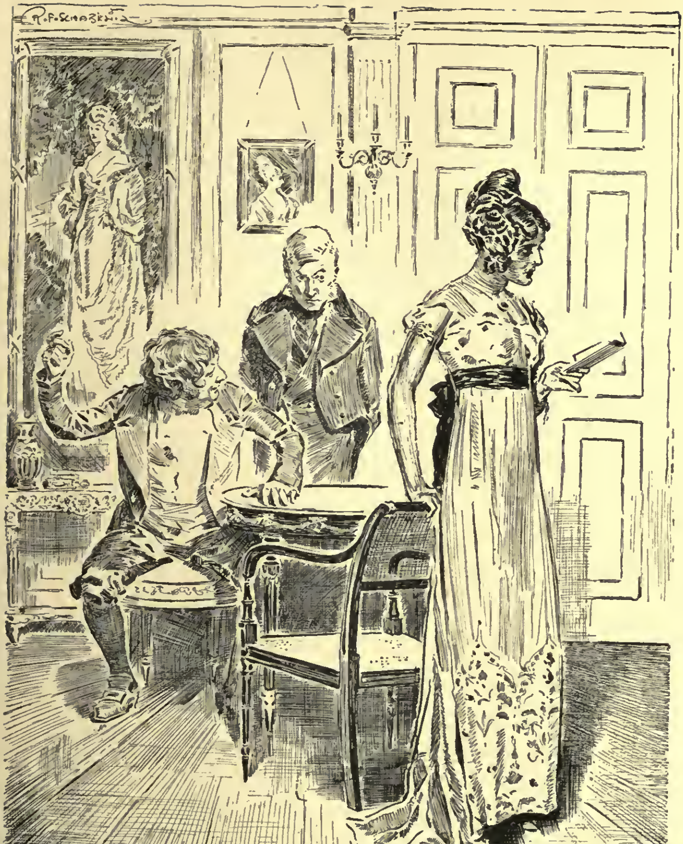
She hastened to look at the fly-leaf, read her name and the author's. "It is very odd. Who is Gervase Poore? I have never heard of him, and certainly never met him."

Tom looked waggish. "It seems that you have. Do you like his rhymes? Have you hit upon *Nausithoë?*"

She looked doubtful. "I think I shall like some of it — I don't know. I shall read it. But you say that I have met him. When was that? Long ago?"

"Some years ago," she was told. "Carry your memory back. Were you ever at Vauxhall Gardens — at a *fête?*"

She thought, then started, and looked quickly.


R.F. SCHABELITZ

"He snaps his fingers at prosody."

"Yes, yes, I was. I met you there." She turned to the Duke. "You must remember it. We were with Di and Carnaby, and I was lost — and you all found me. That was — let me think — three years ago! At least!" Then she turned her eager face to the poet, eager yet serious. "Is Gervase Poore the young man — the gentleman who was so kind as to help me?" Tom nodded and smiled at her. She explained quickly to the Duke, who took it all as a matter of course.

"I lost them, you know, and stood by the entrance to the boxes, to wait until they came. Two horrible, rude persons came up, and began to talk to me. I was very uncomfortable, and did n't know what to do — and then this Mr. Poore flashed in between us like a hurricane, and knocked one of the men down. I hardly saw him, before he was gone again. I just thanked him. But I remember him perfectly. He looked very wild —"

"He *is* very wild, ma'am," said Tom, nodding again.

"Seems able to use his hands though," the Duke proposed.

Georgiana illuminated him. "He was very tall and square-shouldered. High-colored, had blue eyes. Bright blue they were. His hair was very fair. How extraordinary! How very extraordinary! But I think it 's very kind of him.

I shall write him a little letter. Don't you think I ought to?" That was to the Duke, who simply said, "Yes, I think you ought. You 'll make him the happiest poet in Grub Street."

"'T will be a saintly act," said Tom, "but I 'll go further. I 'll ask you to let him wait upon you. He is a charming youth, and me very good friend."

She made an effort to conceal her interest in the poet who had belauded her in print. She was very simple: she liked to be liked.

"Pray let him come. I shall be glad to see him. I can thank him for his book and —"

"And his fisticuffs," the Duke added. "They were probably the more timely gift."

"Despise not the poet's mind," Tom said. "This is a good poet, though I don't say that he 's always very reliable. 'T is a full jug, your Grace sees, and apt to spill over."

"Froths a bit too, eh?" the Duke enquired. "I 'll tell you what, Georgey," he added suddenly. "You shall have him to the ball." Then he turned to Moore and asked, "Has he got a coat, think you?"

"My lord," replied Tom, "he has a first-class coat, as I happen to know, for I saw it on him, and know where it came from. 'T is a handsome coat on a handsome person. He 'll do you no discredit."

"It 's to be hoped that he 'll do his tailor none. But that 's not our affair. Will you have him, Georgie?"

She beamed her thanks. "I should like him to come of all things. That is so nice of you. I 'll put a card in with my note." She went to her desk and wrote.

While she was thus engaged Charles came in, saw the visitor, and advanced with formal courtesy. "Evening, Charles," from his Grace. "Ha, Lancelot, me friend," from the poet, who presumed somewhat in such an address, and showed perhaps a shade of patronage to the husband of Egeria. The husband, at least, was sensitive to it, and grew very cold.

But the poet dashed in with the volume, the author, the past *rencontre* at Vauxhall, and the future preparing "through the courtesy of me noble friend." Charles was respectful to such a gracious act, but a little dry. Georgiana, busy with her note, heard everything, and felt irritated. Her warmth cooled, her pleasure was dashed. She sealed the letter and rose to give it to the poet. "Please give this to Mr. Poore when you see him. You won't of course make it a burden to your conscience. There is no hurry."

"Ah, ma'am," cried he, "but he 'll tear it out of me the moment I 'm clear of the doorstep."

"Why, is he on the doorstep?" the Duke asked. "Let 's ask him up. Charles, did you see a broad-shouldered poet by the railings?"

"No, indeed," said Charles. "It was dark, and I was preoccupied."

"So 's he, it appears," the Duke chuckled. "So 's Georgie here. We are all getting preoccupied. The rogue 's been writing odes to her eyebrows."

"Indeed?" Charles said, and looked at his wife, as if to see, Tom afterwards told Gervase, whether her eyebrows were very fine. They were, in fact, the most beautiful pair of penciled arcs you ever saw. So at least Gervase said.

Tom took his leave of the lady and tiptoed to the door. His coach, he said, awaited him to take him to Kensington. Georgiana put *Nausithoë* into her desk and locked it in.

Charles made no allusion to it or its writer. He dined early and went down to the House. His wife went out to two parties, met the Duke at the second of them and came back in his company to her empty apartment. He left her there, as the custom had now become, with a pressed hand and a kissed cheek. He never did more than that, but the evident fact that he desired more was a daily excitement. Sometimes, it is true, he exclaimed, half humorously, upon her prudery. "Oh, you 're a stiff little lady! 'Pon my soul, I never met such a stickler in my life. Not a foot inside the door after eleven o'clock!"

She smiled meekly, deprecating his mockery. "Dear friend, don't tease me. I'm very tired. And you know what I try to do."

"You don't love me a scrap, my dear. And you try to pretend that you do. That's your difficulty."

She shook her head, still smiling—"No, no, you are wrong. You know that I like to be with you. You are so wonderfully good to me. It is beautiful, how good you are to me. You are my best friend. You know I'm not ungrateful. Oh!" and she was urgent here, "Oh, do believe me!"

That brought him up short. His arm would be round her. "Yes, yes, I was teasing you, as you said. My pretty one, I'm an old ruffian. Good night. Off with you to bed."

That sort of thing did occur now and again; but not upon this occasion, when her noble lover contented himself with a kiss of her fingers.

She took *Nausithoë* to bed with her, unconscious that she had been, half an hour earlier, under the burning eye of her author. Much of it she found exceedingly romantic, some of it rather shocking. The title poem made her wonder. There was no doubting its high seriousness. Whoever this unfortunate lady may have been, loved by a ghost and finding in his ghostly embraces her strange sad comfort, the poet was in deadly earnest. He approached his task in the traditional manner, by invocations:

Queen of the shadows, aid thou me
Telling of fond Nausithoë,
Thy bosom's friend, who for thy sake
Gave up the life we live awake
And lived the dream life. . . .

And after Proserpine he turns to a greater goddess:

Thee, too, O Lady of the South,
Uranian Kypris, I invoke,
Lady of starry space, and stroke
Of splendid wing, in whose strong wake
Stream they who, filled with thee, forsake
The clinging clots of earth, and rise —
Lover and loved — to thy pure skies,
To thy blue ream. . . .

This made her heart beat. Do lovers stream in the wake of Venus Urania? Alas, she had never so streamed!

She read on. This of Nausithoë, "bosom's mate" of Proserpine.

the delicate,
Child-faced, gray-eyed, of sober gait,
Of burning mind, of passion pent
To image-making. . . .

Who was this child-faced woman, whose passion driven into narrow confines drove her to secret imagings of love and lovers? She felt her cheeks tingle. Was it possible that this broad-shouldered wild rescuer, in one flash of his hot eyes had read into the very deeps of her? Was she then Nausithoë, embraced by a ghost? If she was, then what could be made of

O thou meek
And gentle vision, let me tell
Thy beauties o'er I love so well?

Charged with foreknowledge, reasoning *a priori,* she could now read her own charms in the poet's eyes. He seemed to adore what she was accustomed to deprecate. There was comfort for her in such flattery. If he loved her because she was grave and cold; if he loved her shy form, the pallor of her lips, her thin fingers — why, then they were loveworthy! She raised her eyes timidly to the glass and saw herself there anew — desired, desirable, not obscure, but, rather, too rarely beautiful to be discerned. If she smiled at such high praise — and she caught herself at it — there was no mockery of the poet in her smile.

All this preface made the story which followed upon it of absorbing interest.

Ah, love, ah, maiden delicate,
How shall be told thy bitter fate?
Remembered joy, Nausithoë!

A strange and poignant tale, wherein she could not but read herself, as one who was

> as all sweet women are,
> Prudes till love calls them, and then fierce
> for getting or spending.

She read on and read all. The thought possessed her, filled her with unquiet, made her hot with thought, cold with fear, made her eager, made her shamefast; made her wonder, made her long — to know more of this poet who seemed to know all of her, and to be so sure.

In the rest she was conscious of anti-climax; though it must be owned that she hunted, it is certain that she could n't find any possible reference to herself. Which of these ladies could she be? Was she Myrtilla who said the Lord's Prayer backwards at dawn and conjured up a Faun who made love to her? Was she Aglaë the wood-wife? Was she Cynthia? Cynthia shocked her, who "fed on groans," whose "love and hate alike were dreadful, long, insatiate." Had she that in her allure to torture a poet? Had she then tortured Mr. Poore? She wished that he had contented himself with Nausithoë. It was finally as Nausithoë that she went late to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAKE HOUSE BALL

TO this brilliant affair, where all that was noble in London was assembled before him, Gervase Poore the unknown and the truculent chose to come late. He found it easy to explain to himself why he did so. But little Tom, his friend, the pink of good-nature, who came for him even unto Clerkenwell, and found him writing, in his shirt and breeches, could not see it.

"Odds 's my life, Gervase, have ye forgotten the ball?" Tom, dapper in his black smalls, silk stockings and pumps, his ruffled shirt, brooch and oiled hair, looked like the fairy godfather of Cinderella's brother in the raftered and candle-lit garret. The writer looked up.

"I 've got her, my lovely dear! I 've got her here. Listen, you pomander-box!" And he read —

Seeing your love
Sets me apart as one to whom joy can come never,
Yet made glorious as one
Who stands filled with the light of the sun
(Since I behold the mercies I may not claim)
I will raise immortal your name.

"The devil you will!" muttered Tom, who heartily believed it.

All that you are,
All that God hath recessed and treasured in you—
The hint of you in the Spring,
Your glancing carriage, your voice's ring,
Your starry face and the fragile rose of your lips,
Your eyes' sapphirine blue;
All your pure soul,
Keen and wondering, true and eager as flame,
Your sober thought and your pride
To nurse the passion you hold and hide—
The spirit of all that is lovely and void of blame—
I will figure the whole.

He looked up, flushed, and frowning.

"Mighty fine, Gervase," said his friend, and meant it—"but you 'll figure very poorly at Wake House at this rate. Whatever else you figure, you won't figure there."

"I am coming, Tom, you may be sure. But I 'm taking this with me, and so must finish, d' ye see?"

"What good will the stuff be to ye at Wake House, ye gossoon?" cried Tom.

"I 'm going to read it to her," he was told.

For answer to this he received a long stare. Tom was entirely serious: he admired no more; he was alarmed, even shocked. But he had to admit the young man's force. "By God," he said finally, "I believe ye 'll do it."

And then he collected himself. "The Lord be your friend, Gervase Poore, for you 'll be needing a bigger man than *me*. But seeing that such audaciousness is your intent, I have no scruples in leaving you to find your way into the castle. So I 'll take myself on."

"Good-by, Tom, good-by," said Poore, jumping up to clasp his friend. "God bless you for the kindest heart in England.— It was like you to come —"

"And it 's like you to refuse, me poor boy," said Tom. "Advice is wasted on ye, I know — yet I have it in me heart to —"

"Tom, Tom, I know what you want to say. Now see here, my dear. I am going into this headlong — just as I did before. You remember Vauxhall? She cowered there, my beautiful! against the wall — shivering at the mere breath of those goat-footed devils. Tom, she cowers yet. Man — men — Circe's herd — are snarling about her, licking their lips. A morsel! A morsel! A morsel for a moment's lechery! O God! Do you say the age of Pan is over? Do you say Pan is dead? Why, man, every woman is a hunted nymph. Every man is a satyr. She must be plucked out of this — to flower in the open, God bless her! To unfold in the sun! God made this world to be a garden — and what have we made of it? Half a camp and half a lupanar!" He wrung his friend's hand. Tom went sobered away. . . .

When Gervase arrived it was past eleven o'clock. The tall footmen had relaxed their rigidity and lounged in the hall. Gervase strode through them. Divested of his cloak, he climbed the stair, which was broad and marble, and following the sound of music, unannounced entered the first of the rooms. It was very full. It blazed with light. Uniforms, stars, blue ribbons abounded. Plumed ladies, diamonds, a thick and scented air, a continuous chattering sound of voices, talking vivaciously of nothing, laughing shrilly and foolishly — all this he marked as he stood calm in the doorway, hunting down face after face. He knew no one. Charles Lancelot was, in fact, there, prim-faced, whiskered and tall; but Gervase knew nothing about him. He looked for Georgiana with a beating heart, but without conviction. It was only the idea that she might be there which made his heart beat. Had she been, he was sure that he would have been certified by his familiar.

Next, he sought the Duke, whose face and trim figure were common property. Last, Tom Moore — his generous friend. No, there was no man. Through the door at the further end he saw pass and repass, drifting like showered leaves in a wind, the dancers. He would look for her there, and shouldered his way through to the grouped nobility with no more ceremony than if they had been Dick and Harry, Bill and Jack round the orchestra at Vauxhall. He was maladroit, unceremonious. Manners he had none, but shoulders he had, and great inches, and a fine head. He was flushed deeply, his bright blue eyes burned, his brows scowled. He was much observed — and "Who the devil 's that?" came from more than one mouth. But he looked at nobody, asked no pardons, named no permissions, and reached his doorway.

The great ball-room, lit by some thousand wax candles, dazzled him for a moment. He was conscious only of white and scarlet drifting and swirling by; of the slipping of countless feet, of the swish-swish of silk. By and by he began to distinguish, and was then conscious of profound moral revolt. He was aware of white forms of women, bare-breasted, who seemed aswoon as they were wafted about — their bosoms crushed against the men who held them, their heads averted, their eyes half-closed, their lips parted. Hither and thither, round and round they were swept by their captors — whose faces were fierce, high-colored, bright-eyed; who triumphed, who laughed and tossed their heads; who capered and leaped. To every prancing satyr his bound nymph; what Mænad revel could be wilder than this? And she, his goddess, was one of these! He felt that the blood in his heart, insurgent, flowed up and filled his eyes. The white field swam all red. He saw no more; but closed down his eyelids and prayed to the Unknown God — and a vision came over him of a quiet valley, wooded slopes to the margin of a slow-winding broad river; of swallows in a golden evening light, and afar off the tinkle of sheep bells. There on a greensward he saw his lady stand, "the little slim thing" in a white gown. She looked down the valley, shading her eyes from the sun. The sun sank, the shadows lengthened.

> Night gathers, and the crow
> Takes wing to the murky wood. . . .

Soon all was in one level, shadowless light. And there she stood, smiling with lips and eyes, and held out her hand for him to take. Together they turned and walked by the river. There was no need for speech.

The music brayed and pounded; the swooning, caught-up women drifted about. Fine young men stamped their feet as they capered, and Gervase stood at the door prophesying in his dreams.

He came to himself with a start. She was not here, could not be in this very hell. There were rooms beyond, he saw, and he would go. Moving, he suddenly brought up short in collision. "Mercy on us, 't is Gervase!" His cheerful friend, breathless and triumphant, his arm still lightly upon the waist of his partner, beamed upon him.

"Ye nearly drove me to perdition, Gervase. Permit me to present you — Me young friend Mr. Poore, the famous poet. The Lady Geraldine O'Meara."

A fair lady bowed sweetly, and Gervase, only half recovered, inclined his fine head.

It was Tom who did the talking, for the Lady Geraldine had nothing to say, and Poore did not even look at her. She, on the other hand, freely admired him. Meantime Tom chattered and glowed. "A fine sight, Gervase! 'And bright the lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men!' 'T was Byron said it. Me poor friend, me poor dead friend. What a hand at a pen he had — a mad thing entirely. He used it as a sword, and cut figures out of his heart with it. Lady Geraldine, did ye ever see Byron now? Me friend, Mr. Poore here, has the scowl of him." Lady Geraldine smiled kindly and shook her head. She had no conversation. But conversation was not required of any of Mr. Moore's acquaintance. "The Duchess of Richmond of that occasion," he ran on, "was a little woman with a very bright eye. Our noble host here told me that she carried it off superbly, *superbly;* his own word. 'Let the music go on,' she said; 'for God's sake, let us behave ourselves.' And she got 'em all out of the place, and kept the thing going until five o'clock in the morning. And they heard the cannon as they went home by daylight — and the troops were pouring out all the time. Wonderful, wonderful! Gervase, have you made your bow? Well, a word in your ear — you 'll find your Cynthia in the little drawing-room, two rooms away. She don't dance, you must know. Lady Geraldine, shall we have another turn? You will? You are the soul of gallantry, and I 'm not the man to deny myself." He waved his gloved hand, engaged the lady and bounced her away. Gervase pushed through the throng.

From the next doorway, where he stood with his back to the dancers, he saw her. She was two rooms away; but he saw her immediately, and held his breath. For a moment, for the first moment of his life — he knew despair. He felt himself stultified, awake at last to the world as it was. She looked, he thought, like a Bacchante. Lady Hamilton must have looked like that. If this was what they had made of her, then God did not live and reign.

A numbness took him, as he felt his heart go cold within him, cold and dead. It had the weight of a dead thing, and seemed to be dragging him down.

Mrs. Lancelot half sat on the edge of a table and swung her foot. Her dress, which was thin, close and clinging, was dragged up a little to ease her knee, and as her foot swung forward her stocking was revealed to some distance. Nobody of those about her could be aware of it, but Gervase at his distance away could not but see it. The attitude, the action, entirely innocent and unconscious as they were, wore for him a shocking air. They were of a piece with the rest. This young hermit of Clerkenwell was mortally wounded.

And as if she did what she should not, to him her attire was abhorrent — her attire and the abscence of it. Her dress was, in fact, becoming in its daring. It was of thin silk, of a dull Pompeian red, deeply hemmed and fringed with gold. In her hair she wore a gold wreath. The gown clung to her and revealed her form, thin, but exquisitely proportioned to her slender build. It was low in the neck and showed freely half her bosom. But its color took what little she had clean away. She looked almost wan. And in this ivory pale face, her large eyes burned black, and her lips, which she had perhaps colored, looked scarlet. She was happy, or excited; for her eyes laughed, and her teeth flashed. She was surrounded by a demilune of six or seven men of various ages — and among them, conspicuous by his white head, square strong face, erect carriage and air of authority, was the Duke of Devizes, with the blue ribbon and star of his order. Another gartered grandee was there also; and there were young men about her, splendid, groomed creatures, one of whom with great vivacity was paying her open court. And his "little slim thing" sat swinging her foot, painted and powdered, and listened and thrilled at the flattery. Bought and sold like a Circassian — O Christ!

Gervase clenched his teeth, clenched his fists, and as if, like the God he invoked, he was about to scourge the money-changers out of the temple, he pushed directly forward to his business.

A few strides brought him within range, and then she saw him. Not only did she see him, and know him at once, but she saw that he was disturbed, and on her account, that he was about to visit his displeasure upon her, that she, somehow, deserved it, and that it became her at least, to meet it more than half way. All these feelings, half formed, rising like figures out of mist and sinking back again, were within her in the few seconds she had to spare. Her sparkle and wax-light glitter left her; her face looked tragic in its pale vacuity; her eyes loomed. She slid off the table on which she was airily perched and advanced immediately to meet Gervase. The men about her sprang aside to give her place. All observed the oncomer, the Duke curiously, after his manner.

Of course it may have been charity on her part, pure benevolence; recognizing him, she may have guessed that he was unfriended and seen that he was disturbed. It may have been so, but I doubt it. Her own feelings of detected unworthiness cannot be gainsaid, her own acceptance of his reasonable displeasure, her own readiness to be chastened. As for him, he was so possessed by his passion that he had no coherent thought apart from it.

She held out her hand and greeted him by name.—"Mr. Poore?" He did not see the hand; his eyes were fixed upon her own, intently, piercing, as she felt, to the soul. But he muttered something, seemed rather to be stemming a torrent of words with his mouth than framing their utterance; she caught, "I must speak to you — not here — this hateful place — let us go — let us go —" Without a word she took command. "Yes, of course. Give me your arm, please." She put her hand within it as she spoke, and urged him gently away. As they went out of the doorway she turned, nodding and smiling, to the Duke, keenly observant of her. He bowed. Then she hurried her steps, almost running by the side of her fierce escort.

V

EXTRAORDINARY CONVERSATION

SOME prevision of the crisis in her soul's affairs must have prompted her to the bold step she took, when she guided the burning and irresistible progress of the poet to her own drawing-room in this great house. Neither of them had spoken throughout the transit; that is, their lips had framed no words. But messages flew between them — without a word spoken her soul said to his, "Ah, I know what you have to say to me! I know, I know that you love me. What am I to do? You have a wisdom not of this world where all my schooling has been. Teach me, teach me; I will learn." And from him came the stern admonition, "You! What have you to do in this horde of japing satyrs? Are you Circe, to make men swine? Do you play with hyenas, apes, and jackals? What has your nature to do with these?" And hers cried, "Teach me, teach me!" and his, touched with pity, replied, "The way is hard for you."

In her room she sat and looked at her hands, as one twisted round and about a ring upon a finger of the other. He, with his arms folded, stood frowning above her, breathing fast, trying to bring his heart back into its stride, as with the rein one schools a galloping horse. Her own emotion was insistent, but her social instinct was awake, and it was she, under the guiding of that, who first broke the beating silence.

"You came very late. I expected to see you earlier."

"I came when I could. I was writing."

"Ah! Another poem? Your poems are beautiful."

"It was you who made them so."

"I can't think that. Your poetry is a part of yourself."

"It was in me; but you called it out. There is nothing in my book which is not of you."

She was in command by this time, felt that she could smile at his foolishness.

"I don't think I can realize that. Was 'Leda' about me?"

"No, of course not. But those things are nothing. They were done long ago."

"I should n't like to think that I inspired them."

"You did not. I spoke of what was good."

"Of 'Nausithoë'?"

"Yes. That is you. That is your life — a life in shadow, clasping, clasped by, a shadow. A life of unreality."

"I was sure that you did not approve — that you were displeased. What right have you to be pleased or displeased with my life?"

"The right that one who loves you has to be pleased or displeased with what pleases or displeases you. You are not happy, you know your life to be vain —"

She lifted up her head quickly. She was flushed. "Ah, you must not say that. You have no possible right. And it is not true. I have my duties to perform. I believe that I do them. They are not, perhaps, in your world — but they are very real. You are unjust to me."

It was one of those moments when the soul must have its way; and perhaps Poore was one of those persons who can say without offense what others can never approach; one of those persons absolutely serious and occupied with the affair of the moment.

He said — and she was not offended —"You have also a duty to yourself. Unless you perform it, you are maimed, and cannot avail to anybody. Two men love you, but you love neither. How can a woman avail unless she love? It is her whole nature. It is her function. Without it she is a phantom, an empty vase. Lovely you are, but you are empty. Fill yourself. Love."

She was not offended, but she was very troubled.

She faltered and made to look up at him. Then she found that she could not do it.

"What do you know of me?" she asked of her fingers.

"Everything," said Poore. "I have seen you countless times since I saw you first. I think that for three years, whenever you have been in London, I have seen you every night of the week."

"I don't understand — that is not possible — I have never seen you."

"You have looked full upon me sometimes, but you have not seen me. I have seen you."

Curiosity was now awake. She forgot her bashfulness. "When have you seen me? Where?"

"I have seen you at your parties. I have seen you go in and come out. I have stood with the outcasts at the doors and waited for you. In rain, snow, sleet, and slush — on hot summer nights, in fog and mist, I have been there. Sometimes you have been to two, sometimes to three great houses. I have followed you — by scent, I believe. You have a fragrance which I could follow over the world. I have heard you speak — a word here, a word there. I have heard you laugh, and have wept to hear you — for the laughter was thin, from the head and not the heart. I know the turns of your head, the glances of your eyes — I tell you that I know everything about you. You are not yet born. If you have a soul it resides not in your lovely body, but hovers on the outside, seeking an entry, beating with its hands at the door of your heart. You are the slave of your circumstance — you cannot do otherwise than be so because you do not know of your servitude. You know neither your powers nor your rights. The one could demand the other, and exact them. But you drift, a phantom — loving not at all, loved phantom-wise. Two men love you, I say, but you can satisfy neither. Two men? How many more love your delicate, your exquisite person? But one man loves your soul, that lovely winged thing fluttering without you, a-cold, trying to get in."

She sat immovable under this wild apostrophe, immovable as to the limbs; but her short-rising breast and little involuntary starts and tremors betrayed her. She did not raise her eyes for one moment. Her lips moved, and she said, scarcely above a whisper, "You must not say so. You must not love me. You have no right —"

"No right?" asked he. "Do you deny me the right to live? And how can I live but by love? And how can I help loving what I see so excellently loveworthy? That which I adore in you was not sold with the rest. Men do not chaffer the light of the sun, or the west wind that blows over pasture fields, or the rain that washes the flanks of the hills. They fence in the mountains and call them theirs; but the wind bloweth where it listeth; and blows from you to me — and in that air I live and have my being. Do you deny me that?"

She would not. "No, no — that would be absurd. But — I am nobody. You cannot love me without —"

"Credentials? Applying with all forms observed to your proprietors? No, I can't do that. But I tell you that I know you all. I have access to that in you which the world sees nothing of. For at least I am a real man. I dare to love Nausithoë really, and they, shadows! — as shadows."

He spoke in deadly earnest, with a cold intensity rather terrible. Nothing but his obvious sincerity could have excused him in her eyes — in the clear light of that she understood him, accepted him, and believed him. She did not speak for some moments, but sat turning her ring about on her finger, not displeased, rather pleased in fact, conscious of a certain elation at being the chosen of so singular a person, conscious also of having been recaptured by the genius of Nausithoë. That was an elation of the kind which the Duke's notice had afforded her long ago, was perhaps no more, but was certainly no less. Added to that, she was conscious of trouble. His vehemence disturbed her. She did not understand him, yet she felt that his passion for her was not of the kind which the Duke, say, professed. The Duke, she fancied, had of her what he was entitled to have, and anything more that he desired of her was not lawful, and not pleasant. She knew that the Duke's relations with women had not been generally very pleasant. But this young man's passion was different. There was perhaps some sanction for his professions. He had insight: she felt that he knew her — knew her better than either of the men with whom she lived — better than either of them ever could know her. He knew, for instance, that she needed love. Ah, how did he know that, when until she read his poem she had not known it herself? Positively, she found it out from his assertion of it as a fact. Love! Love! Not to be loved, but to love. There was her need. She was hungry. She was starved. Well, if this young man, uncompromising, fierce, abrupt, bad-mannered — if he were to love her, might she not love him? She turned it awfully in her mind. It was a glowing speculation there — no more than that. And she had a suspicion that if she did come to love him, he would be extraordinarily tender to her: and then she had another, that if she did come to love him, she could make him happy. Her eyes were wide and unblinking as she pondered these things.

She it was, nevertheless, who broke the silence; for Poore, having said what he had, said no more, but stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece, looking down at her and scowling manfully.

She said, "You have told me very strange things. I don't know what to answer. I ought to be angry, but I am not. I am sure that you mean what you say, or believe that you do. I don't wish to be unreasonable, and I hope that you will not be. What shall you say if I ask you not to watch me come and go to parties?"

He replied without moving. "If you insist, I shall have to obey you. But you will be making things hard for me. Reflect. I shan't see you at all on those terms."

"Won't you come here?" she asked him. "Should you refuse if I — ?"

He raised his eyebrows. "This is the Duke's house, I suppose?"

"No," said she, "this is my husband's house."

"I dislike your husband more than I can say," he told her. She was very patient with him.

"That is not very polite of you. He has done you no harm."

"No," he said, "but he has done you untold harm. He has married you, used you, and now resents it. 'It!' He does worse. He resents you. He is wounded, he is jealous. Do you call such a man a lover? He loves himself."

" Hush, please. I cannot hear you. My husband is very good to me. He respects me."

" I deny that," said Poore. " He respects himself far too much. He does n't even know what he has done amiss."

She did not ask him what that was — because she knew. Womanlike, she turned to safer topics — safer because they affected him personally, and would therefore draw him off Charles.

" About your vigils," she cried. " Will you give them up? "

He was silent until she lifted her head and looked her appeal into his eyes.

" Don't ask me that," he said then. " I have no other means of seeing you. And if I see you now — after to-night — perhaps you will sometimes recognize me." He waited. " Do you think that you will? "

She smiled faintly, nodded her head very slightly. " Perhaps." She grew more positive. " Yes, I think that I shall. But I shall hate to think of you there — with those wretched people."

" Ah," he said. " They are not so wretched as the people in this great house. At least they can afford to be real. The people here — as I see them —" She suddenly touched him by a look. Her eyes, full of anxiety, reached his.

" I hear my husband coming. I shall present you to him," she said quickly. "Please be kind to me," he read in her look.

"I will do anything in the world for you," he told her.

Charles entered. His eyes made no sign. He came sedately to where she sat.

"The Duke has been asking for you, my dear. I had no notion where you were; but he suggested that you were here."

"Let me introduce Mr. Poore to you," she said. "This is my husband, Mr. Poore."

Charles was courteous, held out his hand. "I am pleased to make your acquaintance. Your poems have merit."

Poore accepted the greeting. "Thank you. It is kind of you to say so." He turned to Georgiana.

"I have kept you from your affairs. That 's bad. You have been more than kind to me."

She denied that. "No indeed. You have — interested me very much. I hope you will come to see us before we leave town."

He bowed stiffly. She got up and took his arm. "Let us go back. You must be presented to the Duke."

Charles said, "The Duke will be charmed. He is in the library, my dear." He opened the door for her.

She asked him, "Don't you come with us?"

"No, I have work to do, I fear. Besides I am out of my element in a ballroom."

"So then must I be," she laughed. "For I never dance, as you know." Charles bowed to her.

"My dear, you would grace any room you entered. I think, if you will permit, I will say good night." She gave him her hand, and he kissed it. He bowed to Poore, who bent his head.

The Duke, in the library with a few people, gave Poore his usual allowance of fingers. "How do, how do. You 're a monopolist, I see. So am I, and that 's where you and I shall quarrel."

"I hope not," said Gervase.

"You 're a heavy-weight, I judge. Nine stun six is about my figure. I 've a good wind, Mr. Poore. But I don't write poetry. Now let me tell you this. I thought yours devilish good in places. I used to read Propertius when I was a lad. I thought you had him very neatly. 'Nausithoë' I don't care for, though Mrs. Lancelot here gave it some tears, I believe. What 's your profession, Mr. Poore?"

"I am a lawyer," said Gervase. The Duke approved.

"That 's a healthy trade. That needs precision. It won't teach you rhyming, but it will teach you the advantage of definite statement. You have to know what you want in the law."

"I think that I have learned that," said Gervase. Georgiana agreed with him. She watched him now and then, caught a glimpse of him in sidelong flashes of her eyes — which were very bright — and approved of him. The Duke seemed to have observed her animation, for he commented upon it.

"What 's Mr. Poore been telling you? Pleasant things, I suspect."

"Very pleasant," said Georgiana.

The great man nodded his head quite amiably, then turned to the approval of the poet.

"It was you, I believe, who forestalled every one of us in Mrs. Lancelot's rescue. It was at Vauxhall, if I am right. You have an arm which I envy you — but you were prompt when we were not."

"I happened to be there," said Gervase. "That was my good fortune."

"You rescued her from very unpleasant companions."

"I should always be ready for that."

"Of course. But we may hope that she won't need such strenuous championship."

"I hope that also."

Georgiana felt the implication in his words, and shifted the ground.

"Tell me of your book," she said. "Have the reviewers been kind to you?"

Gervase smoothed his brow. "I think not very kind. I have the misfortune to live in London. They call me a Cockney poet, and think they have said all. They impute politics."

She laughed. "I don't read politics in your poetry."

"There is nothing of it — unless a wish to see men free be political." The Duke glanced at him.

"We don't talk so much of freedom here, Mr. Poore, as of duty."

"That," said Gervase, "seems to me the chief duty."

"Your Nausithoë used her freedom in a strange way." That was from the Duke.

"She never had any, according to me," Gervase said. "She was a slave from the beginning — the slave of assumptions."

Georgiana, with bright eyes, defended herself.

"I don't read that. Nausithoë chose to go down to Hades with Proserpine."

"Proserpine," said Gervase, his eyes full upon her, "assumed that she would go. She took it for granted, and Nausithoë accepted it. She had no soul. She was not born."

"According to you," said the Duke dryly, "the poor lady never was."

"The poem is unfinished, my lord," Gervase replied. "It is my intention to show her gaining of her soul." Georgiana had nothing to say to this delicate topic, and the Duke, who had now had enough of Mr. Poore, turned to her with others in which the young man could have no part. Had she seen Lady A——? She ought to be spoken with. And would Georgiana go to the D——s' ball on the 27th? He had promised to look in.

Gervase, who stood his ground uneasily, and not for long, took his leave stiffly, hiding but ill the despair that was in him. She noticed that, and was rather more *empressée* than her wont was. Her eyes sought his, and saw the storm in them. Before that she was powerless, and only anxious that he should go. Their looks met; but she was very guarded. He could read nothing in her which betokened the slightest consciousness of what had so lately passed between them. "Good God!" he cried in his bitterness; "is it possible that she is heartless? A few moments ago, and she heard me tell her of my love. She sat and let the words beat upon her; she sat a Danaë to the rain. But she was moved; her bosom was unquiet; her eyes felt the light. And now she can meet me hardily and dismiss me and my business. I am nothing — my gospel an incident in the night's doings! What can be made of such women as this? O God, my beloved! without a soul!" He went desperately into the night.

VI

THE SOUL OF GEORGIANA

THE Duke, who saw most things, was very curious, and had to be satisfied. She told him much; he guessed the remainder.

" The youth is in love with you," he told her; and added, " I don't wonder. Now, you may be very valuable to him. I should have him here if I were you. Let him pour himself out into your lap. Then you can whip him up into some kind of a shape and put him all back into his case again. He 's rather in the rough, you know."

Georgiana listened and smiled at her tolerant friend. He encouraged her.

" I shan't be jealous. That 's not my way. But I don't answer for Charles. You may scare poor Charles."

She bent her head. " I must n't do that. It will make him unhappy."

" My dear child," said the Duke dryly, " with three pretenders, you must make somebody unhappy. The great thing is that it 's not you. Now, as a rule, you 'll find that when men and women get involved in a common venture, it 's the men who come off best. So it will be here if we don't take care. You good little soul!" and he bent over her chair, "I take my oath that you shan't get scratched by me. But I don't answer for Charles."

No more could she answer for that stately sufferer. "I 'll tell you what, Georgie," the Duke said, "I 'll talk to Master Charles for you, if you like."

She looked up quickly, rather scared. "Oh!" she said, "what shall you say to him?"

"Tell him that he 's a donkey," said the Duke, "and that if he 's not careful he 'll be a rogue donkey. What do you say?"

She appealed, smiling still. He understood her long gaze, but maliciously made her speak.

"Well, missy?"

"I would rather you said nothing. You can't help him, or me either. Pray don't speak of it."

"Oh, naturally I will not, if you don't relish the idea."

She assured him, "I don't relish it at all." He patted her shoulder.

"Then no more about it. Let us return to our poet, who may be sublime, but between you and me is a cub. I see you at a useful work — an act of mercy: giving wisdom to the simple." He stopped, then added, "I shan't be jealous," and waited to enjoy her blush — which he did. "Ask him here, my dear," he said then.

She shook her head. "He won't come."

"Ho! won't he though? You try him."

"Really, he won't. He 's very proud."

"What 's he proud of? I 'll bet you my cocked hat he won't be too proud to come here."

But she was positive, nodding positive. "Yes. He says that this is your house — which of course it is."

"Which of course it is n't. However, assuming the house to be mine, I still don't follow him."

"Oh," said she, looking up, "he does n't approve of you."

The Duke took that simply. "He 's quite right there, though I don't know that it 's any business of his. Nor do I see — Bless me, what a gossoon it is! I 'll trouble you for the counts of his indictment."

"He thinks," said Georgiana, "that you are not real."

"Pish! He must do better than that."

"He calls you a phantom."

"Upon my soul," said the Duke, looking at his legs, "that 's the last thing I am." He gave her a very keen look, which she felt — not daring to receive it full — through the top of her head. "And he calls you Nausithoë, I suppose?"

She did not answer. "What do you say to that, Mrs. Georgie?"

She replied murmurously, "I don't think you 're a phantom."

"I should think you did n't," he chuckled. "You know me better than that; you 're not Nausithoë for any default of mine. And *he* won't think so either, by and by, when he begins to —" A movement of hers stopped him. "Never mind, my dear. You don't love me, I know, and I 'm a philosophical fellow, though they *have* made me a peer. I take what I can get and am grateful to you."

She took his hand suddenly and kissed it. "You are very kind to me, Duke." He patted her cheek, then stooped and kissed her without protest. He looked at his watch.

"I must go down to the House. My fellow-phantom has been there these two hours. Where am I dining? In your company?"

"No," she told him, "Charles and I are dining here. Mr. Croker is coming, and you refused to meet him — don't you remember?"

"Yes, yes. Not even for your bright eyes! Do you go out afterwards?"

"Oh, I suppose we do. Shall I look?"

She went to her desk and perused her diary. "Yes, we are at the Sufflecks'. Shall you come?"

"Certainly I shall if you are to be there. Tom

Moore will sing, I suppose, and have all the women weeping. Not you."

"No, I shan't weep. I'll ask Mr. Moore about the poet."

"The other poet. Your poet. Yes, yes. . . . I like that youth, you know. He thinks I'm a phantom?"

"He said you were a murderer too."

"So I am," said the Duke. "God knows!"

Then he went away, and left her to herself and her thoughts.

They were long, but vague — vaguely pleasurable, vaguely despondent. She did not understand whither she was floating now, in what current, in what company in the tideway. Pleasure came to her, a stirring of the pulse, a flutter of the heart, as she thought of Gervase who, for love of her, chance-caught, had for three years waited for her with outcasts at the doors of great houses; who for love of her had heard sweet and wild music; who for love of her spoke boldly as, surely, man had never spoken to woman before, at a first meeting. Was it not extraordinary that she should have won such love as she had — his, flashed into his heart at one blow, in one moment, and the Duke's, almost the same in origin? What did this mean? What had she done? What was she? What could she do in return? What had she left to give? Gratitude — and that was all.

No, not all. She gave the Duke more than that. When all was said, it had cost her something to take this position with him in the eyes of the world — those judging eyes askance which it gave her, withal it smiled and bowed before her. And, to be perfectly honest with herself, this had not been done solely to advance Charles. No, no, that was not true. And now came the question — ought she to tell Charles as much?

She was not only very conscientious, she was very tender-hearted, and could not bear to see him suffer. Now, anxious as he had been for the friendship between his wife and his patron to ripen to his own advantage, he suffered atrociously under it, and, she judged, would give the world to undo what had been done. Some of it, she told herself, could never be undone. Never, nevermore, could she go back to Charles as she had come to him as a bride. Never, never. But short of that she would do anything for him and spare him suffering by any assurance he pleased. Such assurance must come from her, however. If the Duke had spoken to him things would have been made worse; that was why she had begged him to say nothing. And if she herself said anything, she did n't know what might not be the outcome. Charles was so made that it was torture to him to speak of intimate matters. He had never in all their wedded life so spoken to her. He was a born prude. She, on the other hand, was not. She was naturally direct in outlook, direct in apprehension, direct in expression. She was essentially simple, innocent-minded, and honest. He was complex, really prurient, and expression made him shamefaced. She was very undecided what she ought to do.

One thing was clear. Nothing to him of Gervase Poore. So long as the poet did not come to the house that would be easy, and the unhappy Charles need know nothing. And she decided, on other grounds, that she should not ask Gervase to Wake House. She wanted to see if he stood on the watch for her comings and goings; she wanted to see him, if he did so stand; she wanted him to see her; she wanted to greet him with the eyes. She smiled to herself half shrewdly, half ashamed, as she faced and acknowledged these desires. Tribute! Yes, and sweet tribute. She had been married five years, and had come to the understanding of her charms. She was at a dangerous age; and she found danger sweet.

After dinner, when she and Charles drove up to the Sufflecks' in Berkeley Square, she was conscious of heart-beats. She saw, by leaning sideways, the crowd about the doors, and her excitement grew. Immediately she was on the strip of baize she was aware of Gervase. He was in the front rank, bare-headed, and seemed to tower above her. She dared, however, to lift her eyes, to encounter and to hold his. She felt that she spoke with hers; but knew that his said nothing. She was conscious of loss, of a sinking heart; thought that he was vexed with her. It was true, she was late, and he must have been there for at least an hour — oh, how could she tell him of her dinner-party and of the insufferable length of Mr. Croker's anecdotes! The door shut upon her, and left him outside. She wished that she could turn back, open the door again, speak to him, tell him how sorry she was. Then she went upstairs, with her face schooled to company, and shook hands with a Lady Laura, who had been a beauty, and with Mr. Suffleck, who had not.

The rooms were full and very hot; the people chattered like starlings in September. To chatter also was now become so much of a habit that she could think behind her speeches. Think she did, piercingly, with a heart full of generous pity and of high admiration at once for her watching lover. She had, you observe, accepted that assumption of his; and we know that she had been the victim of assumptions. But this particular assumption must be put down to his manner of statement. He had been very positive, but very literal also.

Mr. Moore was there, sang to his own playing and had, as the Duke had foretold, rivers of tears at his feet. Lady Laura herself, fine woman every foot of her, heaved and sobbed unfeignedly. Georgiana did not cry, but was moved to confide somewhat to the tender care of so sweet a minstrel. This, after her manner, she did not do. She distrusted her impulses while she found food for the imagination in fostering them.

It was, however, easy to get speech with Tom, whose romantic habit consisted with a good deal of shrewd practice. Tom knew very well that the Duke had no liking for him. His court to the Duke's favorite was, therefore, assiduous while, recognizing her charm, it was also sincere. He did not know her well, did not perhaps know more than her superficies; but that delighted him. Her "sweet baby face," her eyes' deep blue, her Greek mouth, her straight brow — he exchanged raptures on these topics with any man. Upon her approach he made her most welcome and himself gave her the opening she sought.

"So I pleased ye, with me penny whistle! Mrs. Lancelot, I'm a proud man. Contented entirely! And it comes from your kind lips with all the more balm seeing that I was the means of submittting to your notice, ma'am, a very organ of sound the other day. Me young friend Gervase, to wit. Me dear lady, the boy's a string band compared with meself. A string band he is, with himself the drum-major at the head of ut.

Now what did ye think of Gervase? Let us sit and exchange ideas."

Nothing could have suited her better. She wished to know all there was to be known of Gervase.

Tom told her his history. Son of a gentleman, one Captain Christopher Poore, an East India Company's man, and of a foreign lady (French, he believed), name unknown to him. She, a widow, lived in retirement upon a narrow pension in Dulwich, Gervase was her only child. Educated at Christ's Hospital, where he was always in trouble — for fighting with all and sundry; articled at eighteen to an attorney; was now a clerk on a small salary, and not at all likely to do well with the law. He had, besides, an income of fifty pounds a year from the funds. Tom shook his head over the boy's future. He was too stiff, too unaccommodating to succeed in Grub Street. He would look at nothing but what he chose, and treated a publisher as if he were a dog. He was very ambitious, very opinionated, very arrogant — but very lovable. "At least," said he, "I love him. He despises me, I don't doubt, calls me a time-server and the like of that. But he 's got a noble heart, Mrs. Lancelot, a generous heart. He 's on fire for truth and beauty; he sees the high things and follows them; I see 'em, God forgive me, and don't. After an hour or two of Gervase's conversation I feel as if I had had a day on the mountains — worn out, ma'am, but cleansed — healthily tired. He spares himself nothing, and he spares his friend nothing. He claims all you have, but he gives you all. There are no bounds to him —'tis the most exorbitant, unconscionable, avaricious young prodigal you ever saw!"

She absorbed all this seriously. It fell in with her own fancies about Gervase. She had been very sensible of his vehemence. But as to his poetry she desired to know something. Tom thought that he was a true poet and might be a great one. "He's not a minstrel, you must know, ma'am, but a bard. His music is a solemn music; his ideas are for chanting. He sees life as a procession — not as a pastoral — a sweep onwards to high destinies, not as a sunny pasture where lambs can skip. Love to him is an invocation to a mystery. There should be neither tears nor laughter — it's a great business. I can see him possessed by it, robing for it in white garments; he would take the sacrament before he kissed his mistress. Wouldn't dare else. You knew he was a Catholic? No? Ah, but he is though, and I wouldn't be the priest that confessed him. He'd scold the poor man into an ague before he'd let him give the good words. . . . He's a great man in the rough, is Gervase.

Do you know what he 's at now? The Song of Roland, no less. He 's at it night and day — and marches the pavement chanting Roland and Oliver, and Aude the fair. Did you ever read the pome, Mrs. Lancelot? 'Tis fine, free moving, bloody stuff. But that 's only a piece of what he 's at. He 's got Charlemagne at the back of his head. Will make an epic of him! And Aude the fair! 'Tis my belief he 'll make a lovely lady of her."

Mrs. Lancelot was interested. Her eyes shone. "Who was Aude the fair?" she asked. Tom twinkled.

"'Twas the beloved of Roland, fair lady. You must get our young friend to give you a taste of her quality. I declare that I 'm at her feet meself."

Mrs. Lancelot was very much interested.

Going away, she had the arm of the Duke, and Charles, as usual, brought up the rear. It was so late that she had not expected to see Gervase; yet there he was, impending over her like a cliff. Her heart gave a leap and she felt giddy — but she knew that she was glad, knew that she was proud, knew that she was grateful.

Fate led her so close to him as almost to touch his cloak with her own. She dared not look up, but passed under his gaze as a bird under the shadow of a kite, and flitted into the carriage as if it had been a furze bush. She felt her eyelids flicker as she passed him. From her place of safety she peered out. He stood there looking after her, not moving from the place. She had a fear that he might not have seen her perhaps, that he would wait on and on till they put the lights out and took up the carpet. If he did that, she thought, what sort of passion would take him home — to Clerkenwell! Alas, no staves of Roland and Aude the fair would drive his footsteps! The thought tormented her.

She endured a fortnight or more of this curious and heart-probing experience. Sometimes he was not at his post, and then she was unhappy; mostly he was, and then she was uneasy. Sometimes she dared to exchange a long glance with him, sometimes she tried to let him see that she was grateful for the tribute, sometimes that she was pained at his pain. She could charge her eyes with appeal, with thank you, with *Non sum digna,* with "Yesterday — I looked for you," but she could get no answer. She could not even be sure that he saw her at all. He looked at her, it 's true, fully at her, but without implication, and without recognition. He looked at her as a statue looks at its beholder, to comprehend the whole, but not to discover. It was impossible to take offense; there was no obtrusion: impossible to get comfort; there was no acknowledgment.

Her imagination, naturally ardent, was fired, became acutely inflamed. His life, his dreams, his music, his sufferings swept before her in a series of vivid pictures. She came soon to understand that this nightly strain could not be endured by her, but by him could be indefinitely endured. She felt herself weakening, and knew him very strong. Then she had a curious discovery. She knew perfectly well, one morning when she woke, that she would have to end it.

End it she did, by writing him a letter to the care of his publishers. Hesitating between the proper " Dear Sir," and the sincerer " Dear Mr. Poore," she finally began without address. She asked him to call upon her, naming an hour and day, and signed herself plainly without protestations of service.

VII

THE CROWN

HE replied that he could not come on the day named, nor on any day but Sunday, until eight o'clock in the evening; an awkward hour. But he expressed no anxiety one way or another as to whether he should come or not, and she had to fit him in on her own desire. She did it by throwing over a dinner engagement and leaving Charles to go alone. Charles was unsuspicious, but the Duke, who also had to be told, looked humorously at her, with twinkling eyes. He said nothing, however. She wrote to Gervase again, naming day and suitable hour. He replied that he would be there.

She was very nervous and expected to find the preliminaries difficult; but he was evidently one of those to whom there are none; one of those who live, whether solitary or in company, in permanent crisis; who import their neighbors bodily into the midst of what scene they may be enacting at the moment. So it was now. It was as if he had been awaiting her, regaling himself with fervent soliloquy, which he continued upon her entry with only a slight change of direction — addressing it now to her instead of to the auditory. The man-servant announced him, and she half rose at the name; rose fully as he came in, advanced, and held out her hand. She had dined early and was not in full dress, had modified her toilet simply but withal carefully. As he came to her she saw the crisis in his eyes.

"There 's mystery about your clothes," he told her immediately. "I have never seen you before except dressed for a ball. You are still beautiful, but you are not more human. I think that you are more remote the nearer one gets to you. You are only half human. You have a fairy progenitor somewhere. Morgan le Fay, perhaps, or Vivien, who lured Merlin into an oak-tree with hopes of love, and shut him in there, closing up the gnarly bark till his voice sounded muffled, and his groaning like the wind about the house on winter nights. Have you a heart? Kindness you have, I know: the fairy people are kind. They indulge themselves so. It is as pleasant for them to do kindness as it is for us. But they have no needs as we have. They want nothing but what they can take; they never want to give. That is our great need, to give and not to take. To me now my need makes me cry out. I want to give of my very virtue — to feel it well out of me, to feel — pouf! but what am I saying? But you have no such grief. You smile faintly, wisely; you absorb me with your great eyes; and not me only, but whomsoever they light upon. It seems to me that no man can look on you without desire. You hurt me, you trouble me, you drain me of my force. I was happy before I saw you — now I waste in effort to reach you. But you are out of reach."

This was what he had made out of her in the course of his vigils, and this he gave her while she stood, trembling slightly, fluttering rather faintly before him, as a white moth discovered by the light stands motionless but for a quiver of her wings.

Her dismay gave place to a disappointment so sharp as to fill her eyes with tears. All her anticipations had been pleasurable. She had enjoyed every moment of them — the little mystifications she had had to employ, to Charles, to the Duke — the letter-writing; then the preparation — new flowers for the room, coquetry at the toilet table — her excitement as the hour approached, and then — and then — this cloudburst. Her lip trembled, she could not check her tears. He saw them — at first unmoved.

She stammered, "You are unkind. What have I done? Oh, you are unjust to me!"

He was soon moved — he came to her side — but she motioned him away.

"It is abominable, what you say to me. What have I done to you? Nothing. I had never seen you since that evening at Vauxhall — and you charge me with draining you! What do you mean? I wish you would leave me — it is abominable."

"Yes, I will leave you," he said coldly. "It will be better."

He bowed to her and turned away. In a flash she saw that if he went he would resume his attendance at doors, and she knew that she could not bear it. She held out her hands, and called to him.

"Mr. Poore —" He turned, saw her, went swiftly back, took both her hands, and knelt at her knees. He hid his face in her hands. "O God, I am a villain! O God, forgive me!"

She may be excused for thinking it was her forgiveness he sought. "Of course I forgive you. Please to get up. You distress me — and distress yourself. Please to get up."

He rose, but still held her hands. He looked earnestly at her, and she saw through her full eyes that his eyes were full. "I did n't know what I was saying. I was full of trouble. I have been beside myself. But you will forgive me."

"Oh, yes, yes," she assured him. "Indeed I will. I want you to be happy —"

"The thought of you makes me happy," he told her. "When I am well, the thought of your beauty fills me with joy. You make music wherever you go, like the fair lady of the nursery rime. For your beauty is vocal to me — I hear it as well as see it. Yours is a tranquil beauty — it seldom disturbs me. It has the serenity of Greece. I think of you as the embodiment of that divine air which Sophocles and Phidias breathed, and exhaled in music and in marble form."

He was contradicting himself, but seemed not to realize it. Nor did she. She glowed under his praises as she had cowered when he reproached her.

"Before I saw you," he went on, "I wandered uncertain of my purpose. Clouded forms floated across my field — I had nothing clear before me. Then you were revealed. I knew then — immediately — what I was called upon to do. To hymn you — to declare you to men — that was my mission. Well, I am about it. I am full of projects — they crowd upon me. I will write of you what was never yet written of a woman. A poet promised that before; but I 'll better him. Let me talk to you about these things — But you have forgiven me?"

Oh, yes, yes, she had forgiven him. He kissed both her hands before he let them fall. She sat and he at her feet.

He had his face between his hands, his elbows on his knees, and talked, and talked in a stream. It was an age of talkers, but she had never heard such talk as this.

Love was patent, unashamed. He not only assumed her acceptance of his homage, but her approval of it.

And she did approve. She accepted him and it on his own terms, as she had accepted Charles and the Duke on theirs; but there was a difference. With Charles she had followed the lines of duty; with the Duke flattery had led her; with Gervase it was enthusiasm for his tribute. It came to be very near enthusiasm for him. She hung upon his words, she hung over him with infinite tenderness, smiling gently down upon him where he sat by her knees on a footstool, and in her eyes, and veiling him from clear sight, was a mist of tears. How beautiful, how very beautiful were his words, his thoughts; how noble the thinker; how happy she! She felt as if she sailed high in air. His words were like strong wings which lifted her level with him and carried her safely as they oared the deep. He made her bosom sink and swell fast, he made her tears fall down upon it; he made her heart beat.

" Ah, but you and I together could face a world in arms — you and I together. That is what I dream of. I see the place — I see every detail.

I could tell you what we shall do from hour to hour. I am certain, as I kneel here before you, that all this will come to pass." Then he ended, and,

"Oh," she sobbed, "Oh, if this were true!" and then he turned to her, upon his knees, and clasped her hands.

"Beloved, it *is* true — it *is* true — it is the one real thing in life at this moment. It is true because we know it, each of us. For once the cage doors are open and our hearts are brethren. My dear love, I love you — and I read love in your tender eyes. Ah, you love me, you love me! Is it not so? Tell me — speak to me — look at me."

She looked for a second through her tears — she turned away her face to hide her blushing — but she moved her head, and in a moment she was caught in his arms. He kissed her fiercely and long; his lips held hers and drew the soul out of her body. They clung together, kissing, and then he suddenly let her go, and hid his face in her lap. Stooping over him, as a mother over her son, she put her hand on his head, and let her tears come as they would.

Presently he looked up and talked to her of the new world. "A great life is begun from this moment. You and I are born whole and one into the world. Plato's allegory is in a fair way to be realized, for the two hemispheres are to be made one — a thing which does not happen once in ten thousand years. Observe exactly what has taken place. That which has been a fact for three years — a fact of my being, is now a fact of yours. My love is inseparable from yours, for it is confessed and accepted; yours from mine, for it is acknowledged and received. Now I can leave you for as long as you please, for my faith in you is absolute. You go your way, I go mine about this grubby town; but between us, wheresoever we fare, there stretches a golden thread, unbreakable, upon which, through which, run words, throbs of the heart, urgencies, cries of spirit to spirit; so we talk, see each other, kiss, clasp each other, as now we have. I shall go about my work triumphing; all England shall hear my song of songs; you go your sweet ways, ministering here and there, testifying so to the grace bestowed; raying forth in your beauty and grace the miracle which has been wrought in your heart. Don't think me arrogant if I say that your love for me will transfigure you, or that mine for you is a thing to enhance you, make you rarer and more sweet. It is good for you to love, and good to be loved. So, of course, it is with me. Other men love you, you say? No, don't shake your lovely head. I know that you don't say so. I have no jealousy of them — I am not so mean. I wish you to be loved; I wish all England knew how loveworthy you are. And it shall, it shall. But their love is not to you as mine, because it is no part of you. Mine is absorbed in your nature. Henceforth they who love you must love me too — for you have received me as a sacrament — in the touching of our lips. Now I am in you, and you in me." Once more she received him into her arms, once more received his ardent kisses; and then she rested so, with his head upon her bosom.

By and by, finding her voice, she asked him as a kindness to her to cease his nightly watchings at house-doors. "Of course," he said, "they cease. I shall see you more often and better. For we must meet. We shall have so much to say to each other. It is essential that we meet — often — every day, if possible. Indeed, every hour will be wasted in which we do not meet."

She laughed merrily — she was ridiculously happy, and felt it ridiculous. "Oh, how foolish you are! Oh, how sweetly foolish! It hurts me to laugh at you, but how can I help it? My dearest boy, how can we meet? Do be serious. I think you must be mad. Why, you have your office to begin with — and I have Charles and the Duke to look after, poor dears. And then I have to go to stupid parties, and sit at long dinners, and write notes, and read notes, and see dressmakers — and very soon to go into the country.

No, no, we must be very sensible over this, and you must be very good. Now promise me that you will."

He heard her quietly, and sat up, crossing his legs like a Turk, and frowning hard. "I give up my office, of course."

At this she raised an outcry. "Never in the world! Why, you 'd be ruined. That 's not to be thought of."

"It has been thought of," he said. "Indeed, it 's as good as done. I spoke to Mr. Metcalfe about it to-day. He agreed with me that I should never make an attorney; and I 'm sure I never shall."

She was sobered. "Oh, my dear, this is very serious. Do you assure me that you must —"

"I assure you, my dearest, that I was never more serious. Poetry is henceforward the occupation of my life — poetry and you."

"Ah!" she began to say, but he took her hand and looked up into her face.

"My dear one, my dear one, do you doubt my powers? Never do that. I have found myself, my strength. I know what I can do. And you see, I shall be able to see you much more frequently now than ever before. This day week I shall be a free man."

She was afraid, of course; but he had his way of talking her over — which was not all talking, though done with the lips. She promised to see him when she could; had no clearer promise to make — nor did he ask it of her. Arrangements were to be left to her, he said. Whatever she found good would be good — and so forth.

With that, or the sequels of that, he left her, the glad and confident young man, stooping from his height to catch her to his breast, stroking her face as she nestled in his arms, bending down to whisper his tender words of love and adoration of her quiet beauty, until she felt her brain spin with the wonder and strength of them and of him. Finally he tore himself away, looked at her, held her again long in his arms, kissed her near to swooning, and swept out of the room and out of the house. She saw him stride down Piccadilly, but he did not look up.

She would have been thrilled to hear of his last act before he left the region. Near Down Street a poor painted thing, a wisp of frippery and sorrow, stopped him with her preposterous proposal. She was half-hearted, she faltered, for she had remarked his haste. But Gervase, who always did the incalculable thing, stopped and took her by the arm.

"I must tell somebody — and why not you? What you ask me is absurd, and I 'll tell you why. I am to be the happiest as I am already the proudest man in the world. I love, I am loved; is not that enough? Happy — O God!" He threw his head up to the stars, and laughed aloud. "But you — you are not going to be happy. No, no. But it shan't be my fault." He plunged for a coin. "Live honest, my dear, this night, and pray for me by a clean pillow." He gave her a crown-piece and flashed on his way. She thought him a god, burst out crying, kissed the coin, and held out her arms after him in the dark.

VIII

FIRST FRUITS

IT did not need the Duke's perspicacity to discover the preoccupations of his Egeria during the remainder of the season. The facts that her attentiveness to his claims was redoubled, and that more tenderness was employed in his service were of themselves enough to convince him. He was touched to see how she hovered over him, how she lingered in her farewells at temporary separations; for if she left him for half a day or a couple of hours she bade him good-by, and offered him her smooth cheek. He was very much touched; but he divined the cause, and even got satisfaction out of it. Strange, chill-blooded, well-balanced voluptuary that he was, where his appetite was not concerned, he could be as sentimental as any esthetic philosopher you please; and it is a fact that he promised himself distinct and precise enjoyment out of the spectacle of Georgiana deep in the bath of her first affair of the heart.

Something that he had said to her a few days after the appearance of "Nausithoë" might have enlightened her, but did not. It was made plain that he had read the work. It was lying on her table, and he picked it up. "A queer fish, the poet," said he; "but a keen-sighted dog too. Do you see the hang of it all?"

She had thought so. "Yes, I suppose so. I understand it, if you mean that."

"'Remember'd joy, Nausithoë!'" he quoted, and ran on for a few lines. "Now what a thing for a woman that is — to have 'remember'd joy' to fall back upon."

She bent over her needlework, glowed over it with a keen intensity of vision, and her brows knitted. He watched her for a while, then went on.

"I 'm no poet myself, but I must say that your man 's got a thought into this thing. How many women have phantom lovers! Thousands, by George, thousands! Now, Georgie, mark this. No man has a phantom mistress. Never, never! That 's certain. But when we are out to-night — wherever it may be — I 'll undertake to show you the women with phantom partners — husbands or lovers, it 's all one." He looked at her again sharply. "And sometimes, my dear, they have both, and get nothing but emptiness out of either."

Her head was deeply bent, her chin close to her bosom. But she looked up presently, and fixed him fully with her serious blue eyes. "They know no better," she said, "and feel no need."

To that he countered, "But if they do, and when they do — what then?"

Her outlook was dreary. "They have to learn to accept consequences. They are better at paying their debts than men are."

"My dear," he said gently, "I would help you if I could." She shook her head, smiling kindly at him with her good eyes.

"You can't. There 's nothing to be done. I have my ghosts, and like Nausithoë must content myself. I can dream, you know."

He turned to the window. "You can't live on dreams," he told her. Yet that was precisely what this least dreamy of men was himself doing.

But just at this time (without the least suspicion on her part that he saw anything) he had begun to see his Nausithoë in a fair way to have a lover of flesh and blood. This would be no dreamer, he warranted. He was not by any means sure how it would prove, but he fancied that she would finally claim more than a shade. He had to face that, and get what comfort for himself he could out of it. Whatever was to happen to her, he thought, she would get some flesh on her dear bones, some blood into her worn cheeks, and a dewier touch of magic in her eyes. All that, said he, was surely to the good! Georgiana, he thought, would dazzle the world, as she had dazzled him already, when the Fairy Godmother touched her so with the wand. The upshot interested him vastly; he saw nothing but satisfaction to come out of it. As for himself, he was (I have affirmed) either a sensualist or a sentimentalist; but never both at once. Georgiana had him on the latter side, though there had been a time when it might have been otherwise. But he knew very well the worth of a woman's No, and that moment of tensity, when, held in his arms, still, quivering with her passion for honor, she had fought him for her soul, had been for him the moment of the most absolute defeat he had ever had. He knew himself. He knew her. She was as safe now with him as one of his daughters, and a thousand times more dear. Moreover — and here you have the man — she would never stint him of his dues, never fail him: that he knew. *Bocca baciata non perde ventura.* He observed, with a twinkle, that since her happiness had brimmed over — so that she actually flitted singing about the house, and could be heard singing to herself as he stood outside the door — he observed, I say, that she was more effusive with him; was freer with her endearments, her touchings, and laying-on of hands, offered her kisses more beneficently, received his own more gladly, was less on her guard, more her natural, warm-hearted self; and that even with the glum Charles she was on better terms. She rallied Charles; she quizzed him; she made him talk, was less on edge with his punctilio, took him and his troubles far less tragically. When he was not abroad, he dined with the pair at least twice a week. Her new gaiety, her new freedom were noticeable. You would have said that Charles himself must have remarked them. At this rate, said the Duke to himself, we shall have her bursting her bodices. All seemed pure gain to this singular statesman.

As for Georgiana herself, she floated betwixt Earth and Heaven, in a state so woven of light and music that the acts of benevolence she did to those about her were little more to her, doing them, than assurances that she still waked and lived among men. She touched men, as it were, to be safe, and sure of safety, as children touch wood in the garden game. But a great elation was upon her, a universal charity. This latest assumption she had suffered was of a divinity. She looked down from her skyey throne benevolently upon all the groping world, and to give every denizen what he desired seemed to her not only charitable but reasonable, and only dangerous because so frankly selfish on her part. It hurt her, when she thought of it, to realize that everybody was not as happy as she. Danger to her from humored men! How could there be danger to a woman marked by Gervase for his own by kisses?

It was not that she was merely loved. She had been loved before, and was loved now, by two men. It was not that she loved and could lavish her treasure. It was that, loving, she was beloved by him whom she adored. That uplifted her, that mutuality. There was confidence as well as partnership. From the first moment of surrender she had been sure of herself; but when he came to seek her in the ballroom she had been sure of him.

Remembered joy, Nausithoë! Score it up against the lean years.

Her kindness to Charles, as good as a comedy to the Duke, watching it and chuckling, sprang not only from that benevolence which her own well-being excited in her; it was prompted also by the feeling of safety. She had given her heart to Gervase, and had no thought what was done with the rest of her. Charles might have demanded what he would of her, and have had it too, without any harm done that she could have seen. So she was kind to him, and even cruelly kind; she drew him out, poked fun at him, took his arm sometimes, let her hand stay upon his shoulder, flattered the poor man, for moments, out of his depression. Only for moments, of course; for Charles was that sort of man who could not be happy in Naples, because he had not been to Rome. The bitter seed remained in his cup that so many years had passed when she had not been so kind to him as she was now, and that the years when she had been kinder had gone for ever. But for her, at least, it was a great thing. She was no longer afraid to be with him in the evenings; in fact she welcomed the rare event because she could talk to him about Gervase with perfect comfort. He had no jealousy of Gervase; she had found that out. All his suspicions were of the Duke.

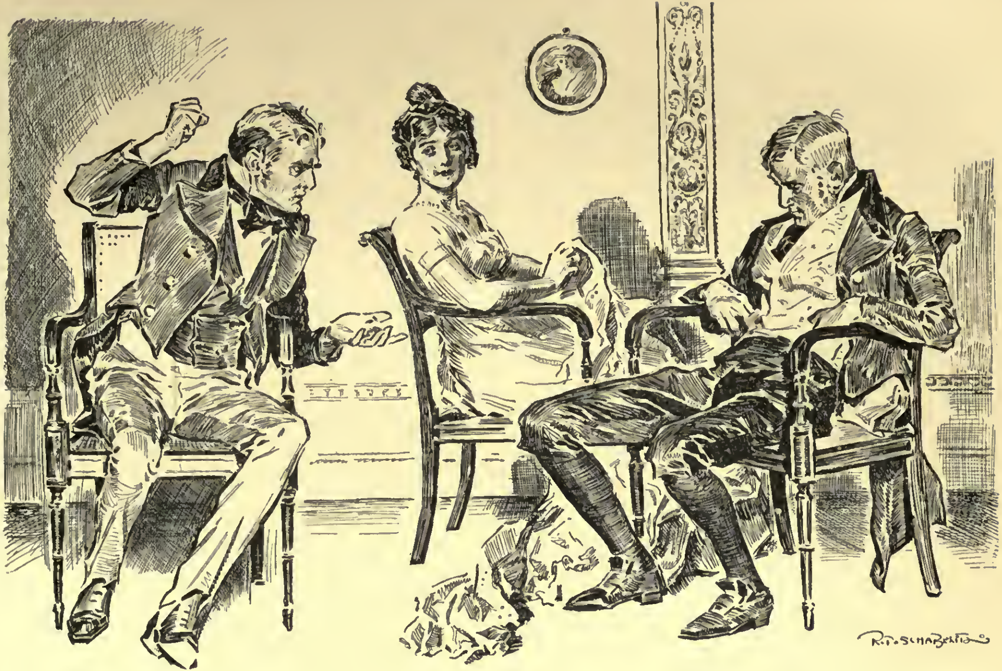
He read "Nausithoë," and they discussed it. Charles considered poetry as an elegant trifling. Gervase's future was a frequent topic. Charles considered that his opinions would be a fatal bar to his advancement by the road of politics. He knew nothing of any other road. He asked once, Could not Georgiana employ him as secretary? She allowed herself to bathe in the golden thought, lay, as it were, and let it sleep into her — but laughingly excused herself.

Once or twice, perhaps, she had the poet to dinner when Charles was there; but the dinners were not successful. Gervase was so bored by the good man that he became alarmed for his own state of mind. He found himself shivering like a man in a fever. He did not mean to be rude — naturally, he was blunt but not discourteous; but Charles had the effect upon him of stirring him to impotent rage. He wanted to break up Charles;

he was consumed with the desire to cut him somewhere and discover real blood; to shock him into a human cry; to take him unawares and find a man under the smooth vellum. Charles, he said, made him feel like the Tempter of our Lord. He would have flown with him to the Cross of St. Paul's, to show him the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, but that he would most certainly have thrown him over the parapet, to be satisfied by that violent proof that this being, who did not seem to live, could die. After dinner, when his host had gone to the House of Commons, Gervase would stalk the drawing-room and rave. Charles's urbane, constant, monumental dullness made him incoherent. He denied him virtue, unless a jelly-fish had virtue; he denied him attributes. He could only be judged by the absence of attributes. He was the Everlasting Nay; he was like the Mosaic Commandments, which told you what you should not do, but gave no hint of what you should.

When the Duke was present things went much better. Gervase disapproved of the Duke, but respected his strong mediocrity. The Duke was common-sense incarnate: by that nothing whatever could be *done,* but all could be maintained. The Duke was the journeyman of the state, who kept the parts oiled, and had the grace of being able to laugh at the work he did without ceasing to do it. And an autocrat, he said, was ten thousand times better than an official. An official goes by rules which cannot fit any case at all — since every case varies from every other case. A despot goes by will, which can be modified by other wills, and swayed by living considerations. He and the Duke, in fact, amused each other. His handling of Reform — that burning topic — as a thing too obvious to be worth discussion was a continued delight to Reform's stout opponent. To Charles it was extremely offensive. "Get it, get it, by all manner of means," the Duke used to say; "raise the country, and you 'll have it. But if you break the law I shall put you in jail." "Your Grace talks of the law of England as if it was the Law of God." "So it is, young man, while the King lives and reigns." "The Lord's Anointed!" cried Gervase in a fume. "The Lord's Anointed," said the Duke with plain gravity. What are you to do with a man who says plumply that he believes the King to be the Lord's Anointed? In its way that is a sublime belief. So is that which says that the earth is flat. Gervase was not at all intolerant of opinion. What he abominated was the absence of opinion.

But he would take nothing of the Duke in the way of hospitality or bounty. He would dine in his company, at Georgiana's table, but not at


R. T. SCHABELITZ

When the Duke was present things went much better.

his own. And he would take no office at his hands.

Meanwhile, during one golden, perfect month reigned the summer of Mrs. Lancelot's life. The halcyon time, they called it afterwards, from a poem of Gervase's which described her coming out to him in the early morning, in her close blue gown:

> When like a halcyon in his bronze of blue
> Forthward she flashed —

it begins — and has her fast. Reading herself in this and other of his pieces was like looking at herself in a magic glass and seeing all her familiar features enhanced and burning bright. Was this the face? Was this lovely and glorious image Georgiana Lancelot's? She might have fallen in love with herself, urged by him to the state of Narcissus; but she knew that he was deceived, and loved him the more for it. O Gervase, O fierce lover, O poet, was it possible that he had loved her so long, and she had never known it? What glory for her, what constancy in him!

She took a pride in herself which she had never had before. Her dress, her ornaments, the manner of her hair became a delight. Admiration in the world was so much tribute to the discernment of Gervase, who had seen her fair and sung her divine long before the world had known her so. This was very unjust to the Duke of Devizes, to say nothing of Charles; but she could not give by halves to one who gave her all. She not only tended her person; she was concerned for her mind too. She read in all her spare hours, and followed breathlessly in his meteor wake. The time they actually spent together was almost nothing by the clock; but they wasted none of it. From the moment when she fell into his arms the assumption, the chief of many, was made. She believed everything, took everything for granted, and so did he. Their confidences were as complete as their confidence. He had nothing to conceal, and she concealed nothing — even of that which she should. But it was a test of loyalty, and an enormous comfort. He hated to be told of her wooing and marrying; but he must have it all. She told him of the death of her baby, not accusing Charles. That he did for himself; he accused him bitterly. It added vitriol to his scorn of the man with which one day to bite him. By the clock they met perhaps for three hours a week; every two days he wrote to her or sent her a poem. But full possession lasted from sight to sight. There was not a moment of the day when she was not filled with the sense of Gervase; not a moment when, in the midst of some crowded assembly, she could not shut her eyes and see him — see him, hear his voice, feel his kisses. She triumphed in her penury which gave her such strength as this. Positively she believed herself more certain of him when he was not with her than when he was.

For Gervase, of course, was an exorbitant lover. Entirely careless of the world's opinion, he was as delicate as a weathercock to the lightest flicker in the breath of hers. His claim upon her — once she had owned to her love — was limitless. He arrogated every right — and she felt that, and dreaded the hour when he should become explicit. She understood that what would satisfy her would not him. That was the swinging sword overhead which made her joy so fearful and so intense. It made her eyes wistful, and her mouth avid for the kisses of his mouth, lest the day should come soon when she would have to decide whether she could have them or not. She was conscious, therefore, of a feverishness in their intercourse, which he took from her, without realizing what it meant.

But he had his better times, when he was, surely, the most delightful companion in the world. He had a strong sense of humor, and colored with it everything he touched. His eye for likenesses was extraordinary. Men strutted and peered in birds; birds flapped along the pavements like men. He made up stories as they walked of all the people they met — romances in which crossing-sweepers and orange-women, whiskered footmen and stout clergymen, and nursemaids, potboys, dandies, and deuce-knows-who were the victims or avengers of terrific love affairs. He was as quick to tears as to laughter, a fiery enthusiast for beauty, courage, swiftness, truth, and simplicity. He was without any sort of self-consciousness — careless in his dress and in what he did. But he never did anything of which an honest man might be ashamed, and did the business in hand with such perfect sincerity that there could be no sting in it due from any one with the power to wound him.

Two things in the world he hated: dullness and affectation. All other things he was ready to love; but next to women he thought trees the most glorious work of the Creator, and was sure that they had souls. He went out with Georgiana once to see a review of troops in Hyde Park and looked at the trees the whole time. He would talk of nothing else. The splendid immobility of them, their plain kinship with what is permanent, essential and abiding in the universe, showed men, he said, like lice. From this ruling he excepted women, however, who to him were not human. But here, as elsewhere, it was impossible to know whether he was serious or not; for he had a way of stating his most preposterous inventions in a plain voice, as when he alleged that the Archbishop of York had silver soles to his feet owing to an accident at birth, and that Lord J——y drove out daily in his curricle accompanied by eagles as supporters. There 's no doubt he believed these fables at the time. On the other hand, he flamed forth as the paradoxes of an Irish orator some of his dearest convictions. It was good to hear him upon Reform with the Duke — good for all but Charles, who regarded the *status quo* as of high moral value and not as a convenience to business.

But, after all, he had come into the world to be a poet, and such he was from the tissues. He breathed poetry, thought in its terms, lived and loved in and by it. Ideas were things to him, and things had appearance because they were ideas. This put him counter to the rest of the world, in the which opposition even Georgiana found herself more than once. Even when he clasped her, kissed her, adored her, she felt that what he so loved might quite easily have been a tree or a sunlit cloud. He admitted that in quieter moments, and added that she might equally well have been Goodness, Temperance, Justice, or Fortitude; for such were real to him because they could be expressed in beauty. There threatened — and she felt it — a time when the discrepancy between what he thought her and what she knew that she was must yawn and sever them; but he said No to that. Before ever that gulf could be reached she would be his, one with him, in flesh as well as in spirit. Not yet, at his fiercest, had he urged that completion of their love; but every stave of the poem which composed their intercourse implied that, and her courage fainted when she thought of the time when this forking of ways must be met.

For the one vital difference between their natures was this, that Gervase believed passion to be a divine urgency, and she that it might well be of the devil.

IX

WOUNDS IN THE OPEN

THIS halcyon time ended perforce with the days of parliament. The prorogation came in the third week of August, and then the great world flitted, leaving London empty, and Gervase in it, gnashing his teeth.

The Lancelots were going first to Thorntree, later to join the Duke in a round of visits. Gervase now had actually to face separation from his mistress. An open invitation from the Duke was at his service, but he would not have it.

He met her the night before her departure, and faced it in his worst mood.

"This is horrible," he said, having her in his arms; and his words in contrast with his embrace seemed to her most dreadful. "For a silly custom you suffer me to be divorced. We belong to each other by the most sacred of ties. What! After what has passed between us — vows of the lips, oaths of the eyes, chrism of the heart — you think we are not one! But we *are* one — nothing ought to separate us. And you go from me with one man, and then court the company of another

— and I, your true husband, am left here. Oh, my adored, it is monstrous — monstrous! But you submit — it is that which kills me — you submit to a servitude. You don't rebel; you don't even desire to rebel. You fold your hands, bow your head, and this foul machine — Juggernaut brown with old blood, and slippery with new — drives over you. You lift up your eyes, you sigh, 'Blessed be the Lord our God!' and the wheels crush your bright body into the dust! Death and Despair!"

She soothed him with voice and hand; she anointed him with her eyes, with her lips; she reasoned with him — but he would hardly listen.

"No, no," he said. "You have given me your heart, and thereby I have all — I have all. Those others have no rights. If you were to say to Lancelot, 'I cannot come with you. I have affairs in town,' what could he say? What could he do?"

"Dearest," she said, smiling sadly enough, "he could ask, 'What are your affairs?'"

"Then," said he, "you could tell him what they were. I will tell him myself, if you like. It is time."

What was there to say but "Dearest!" what to do but to kiss the preposterous creature?

He arrogated to himself absolute disposal of her heart, time, and person. He set no bounds to the charter which, as he said, she had sealed on his lips with hers. The heart had spoken. What did that involve? What inference must be drawn? Why, every consequence — every inference. All was his, that being his. How could the body do, without sin, that which the heart would not? He raised his hand to heaven above her head. "By all honor, all truth, all reason, all justice, you are mine. And they tear us apart — you and me! Let God hear me — this is iniquity."

He would have carried her off then and there — he made it a grievance that she gently denied him. Yet (probably) if she had consented, he would have denied himself. Such was Gervase, a true poet, and a preposterous young man.

He seemed to draw her soul shuddering out from her lips, he strained her to him until she gasped with pain — but he went out in a tempest of resentment — gave her a dreadful night, and himself one of delirium — and next morning she received six sheets (there was no reason why they should not have been twelve) full of contrition, vows, promises of amendment. With that in her bosom she set out for Gloucestershire.

He wrote to her every day — his letters franked (absurdly enough) with the flowing script and style "Devizes." With no less incongruity (with more perhaps — and she felt it) her replies bore the name "Charles Lancelot."

Every letter he sent her was in truth a poem, written with his heart's blood. She felt a dreadful reality beneath the impossible ascriptions he gave her, and a dreadful certainty that life and death were now involved in their common business. So real was the strange world in the which every word he wrote he dipped her the deeper that the life of her old home — her father's county duties, her mother's airs of county lady, Diana's flirtations, and Augusta's nursery — seemed like comic opera. She sat, a bored or scared spectator, absorbed in her own tragic affair; she spoke at random, loved to be by herself. The daily post was her bidding-bell, which summoned her one more stage upon the fateful journey she was going.

Gervase was an inexorable lover. There was no escape from him. He waxed under the ardor of his own mood, as if warming himself at his own fire, until his whole being was incandescent. His words seemed to have dripped hissing to the paper, to have burned themselves there. She could almost read them through their cover, and wondered sometimes how the wax could hold them, and not melt. She could not by any means cope with them — though they affected her dreadfully. She used to sit trembling with them in her lap, pale and trembling; then with a long sigh she would go about her duties such as they were, and when she was recovered would write a guarded reply. If she had answered, as he writ, in the heat, God knows what she might not have said. She had not tongues naturally, and all her instinct was towards compromise. Alas, her temperance was a stumbling-block to him. The tide of his passion boiled and swirled round against it; rose, topped it, carried it away and rushed forward, heaving, to the sea — a sea to which it was carrying her too. And, half fainting, she knew it and, half fainting, was glad and unutterably happy. But the night, the desperate, inexorable, leaden-footed night brought her, at least, counsel, if not sleep — and she began the battle again.

For she was absolutely clear in her own mind of two things — that she loved him entirely, and that she must not yield. It was impossible to her to deny either proposition. They were self-evident. It is a marvel that one at least of them was not evident to all the world. But so far, only one person knew it (and he was at Marston Mortimer entertaining a Royal Duke, whom Georgiana had excused herself from meeting, on grounds too plain to be refused) ; and one person suspected — Gussy, her younger sister. The loyal, unhappy, frost-bitten Charles knew nothing. All his jealous eyes were for another, who, fine man, was perfectly negligible. He should have turned on the Duke hopeful eyes, if he had known the truth — all his hopes were really there.

So August wore through, and in September the Lancelots left Thorntree and proceeded to pay visits, mapping out a progress which should take them through the West into Sussex, where the Duke expected them.

Letters pursued her wherever she went, and had to be answered. Charles's ducal bag saved her from many prying eyes — and Charles himself never dreamed of looking at her correspondence. Such a deed would have been impossible to him — not from any clear motive of honor, but because the act of prying would have admitted to himself that he was jealous; and his self-esteem could not have supported such an avowal. Queer are the motives which prompt the actions of us men!

But, in the pressure of her private cares, poor Charles could make no headway. His complete ignorance of them gave him an insignificance in her eyes which was actually offensive. He belittled himself; she felt sometimes as if she were dragging him after her like a bramble at her skirt; at other times (under Gervase's spell) as if it were he who dragged, and she who felt the scorch of the fetter. He was a continual reminder to her of irksome duty; she could hardly bring herself to be civil to him, so much he fretted her nerves. Luckily for her, every house she went to was full of company. She plunged into the fussy trivialities of the life, chattered, laughed, listened to bores. By such means, for moments at a time, she drowned in shrill noise the wailing in her heart. If Gervase could have seen her, flushed, glittering thing that she was, he would have denied her a heart at all.

Lady B——'s party, which a diarist, already quoted, has hit off for us, was the last she joined before going to Marston. There she met the Duke, and with him was to go on to his house. She was the most courted, but the most elusive guest; for the Duke and politics claimed her. Politics were gathering to a head. February, it was supposed, or May at latest, would see the Reform Bill before the Lords — and what was the party to do? It was no secret that the King wanted the Ministry out. He had quarreled with nearly every member of it, and was beginning to distrust the Duke. Correspondence flowed upon him. The library tables brimmed with it, and from Windsor every day came a note by a special messenger, requiring some sort of answer. Charles was in high fettle. He loved such detail, and could forget his troubles in it. Georgiana found it very difficult to be interested, and the Duke was unaffectedly bored. He had been overjoyed to see her again — had ridden out half-a-dozen miles to meet her. He had her to himself both before and after dinner; scolded her for her thinness, for her pale cheeks — met pleasantly, not seriously, and did not press for explanations. He asked after " her poet," was told that she " heard from him," nodded and pretended that nothing was happening.

But much was happening; in fact, the outrageous young man, after a day or two of silence, came to Bagington, hovered on the outskirts — the thickets of the park and what not —and presently contrived to make his presence known to Georgiana. Between joy at his nearness, terror at his daring, and fear of eyes the poor lady nearly succumbed.

The note was brought to her by her maid when she was dressing. An hour was named — " to-morrow at eleven "— by a certain great tree in the park. It might as well have been on the lawn before the morning-room windows. She — in desperation — she was like a trapped mouse — burned it and made no reply. The morrow must provide for the things of itself. She had too much on her hands for this night — a great dinner in a house full of people.

The diarist remarked her pallor, and remarked upon it to her husband. " Lancelot, your wife works too hard. She looks as if she saw ghosts." Nausithoë's fate leaped into Charles's mind; he made formal answer.

The racket of the interminable evening passed over. Talk, and the fictitious interest which is necessary to it, and can be feigned, filled it. You have to be a very great man indeed to be able to be silent at such a party. Such was the Duke. He stood, most of the time after dinner, stiff, looking straight before him, but Georgiana, whom he honestly loved, was always within his field of vision. He knew that she was disturbed, though so great was her self-command that nobody else knew it at all.

Her agitation was due to the knowledge of Gervase so near her, and yet so entirely out of her reach. Her eyes, wandering, vaguely searching, sometimes fixed themselves upon the windows, rested there, straining, staring, as if to see through them, through the dark, through the mist. She felt certain that he was there. This made her shiver, left her trembling.

She went to bed, but did not dare look out into the night. She had a feeling that he would call her. And if he did, she knew that she would go.

And how she longed to go, ached to go, she dared not reveal to herself.

A hasty two words passed with the Duke at candle-lighting time —" Georgie, you are upset. What 's the matter? "

" Nothing, nothing — I 'm tired, I think. There 's so much talking. We are always talking, are n't we? Is n't it extraordinary? "

" I don't talk. I watch — you."

She was petulant. " Please don't do that. I feel it sometimes. It troubles me. You seldom do that."

" You shall be obeyed. But I know that something is going on — which you don't like."

She made no answer. All he could add was, " If I can be of use to you — in anything — don't fail to let me know. To fail in that would be failing me indeed."

She succeeded in looking at him. " No," she said, " I won't fail you, Duke." He kissed her hand and left her. She shrouded herself in the dark, and lay half the night listening, trembling, glowing at the thought that he was there, that she should see him to-morrow.

In spite of the suffering he had caused her, the actual sight of her lover assured him a smooth face and a bright-eyed welcome. There was added, to enhance the effect, real admiration of his daring. Gervase was certainly incalculable, splendidly out of the ruck of men. She came to him, then, rosy, sparkling, with welcoming warm lips —" Oh, my dearest, how wicked of you! "— but how she loved him for his wickedness! " How could you do it? " Why, what else could he have done? " Indeed, I love you beyond words — but you terrify me."

His first answer was to enfold her in his arms, his next to be the most reasonable man alive.

" It would have been impossible — feeling as I do — to have kept away from you any longer. There is a breaking-point to every strain. Letters! How can they express you? Or poetry? How can you write poetry in the midst of stress? The stress must have passed; the mood must be tranquil. I have n't composed a line since I left you six weeks ago."

She flashed him a radiant look. " No poems! And your letters! "

He ignored these burning odes. " I had to write, for mere life. But enough. That is over now that I have you. Don't ask me how I have lived — or where. I don't know. For that matter, twopence a week or whatever it may be gives you a narrow range. I believe I am in debt to my landlady. I 'm not certain. She will tell you. . . . Oh, I suppose I have been nourished, as far as that goes. Bread is not dear just now. . . . But the bread of the soul is dear, my angel — I am starving in the soul. It 's not reasonable to ask me to live like this. It 's bad for me, and bad for you."

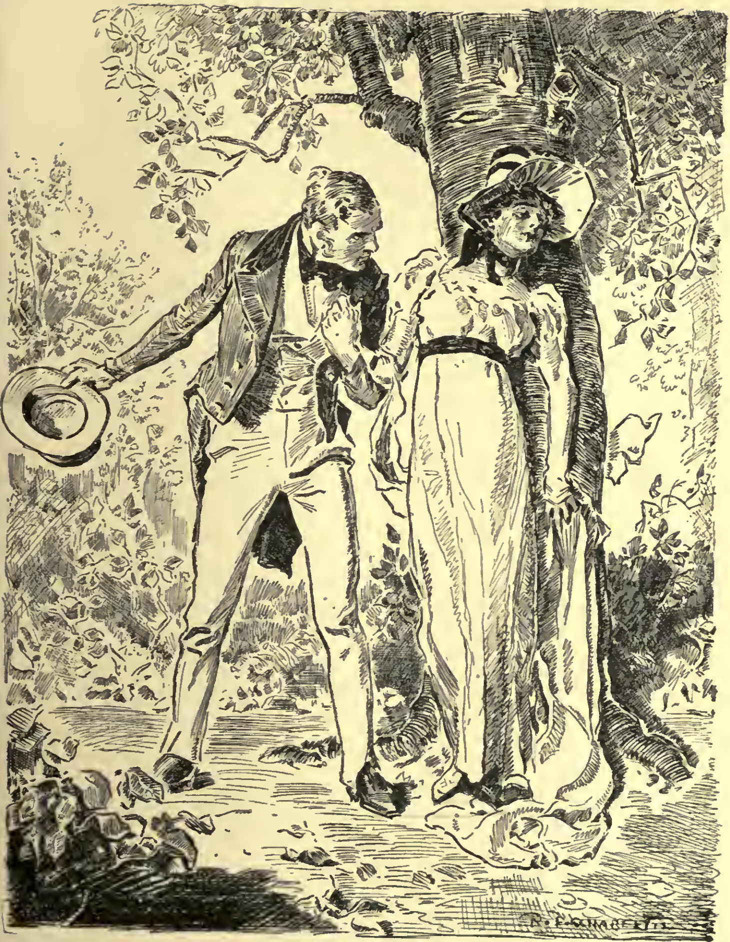
She clung to him, nestled in his arms. All her own troubles were put away, to succor him in his. Far more real as they were, she ignored them. "My dear one, my dear one, I know how dreadful it must be for you. But what can I do? I would give the world up to make you happy —"

"It would make *you* happy, my angel, or I know nothing of women — least of all women, of you. Ah, what a life we could make it, you and I! What a life!"

She quivered — she could not trust her voice. For her powers of vivid dreaming were as great as his, though he had expression and she none.

He went on —"I see it, I see it all. You and I, wholly one, as we are now in part — in this maimed life, in rat-traps. You in a trap — I in a trap —running round and round —'I can't get out! I can't get out!' Oh, horrible slavery! And what adds mockery to horror is that we *can* get out." He strained her in his arms. "My adored one, we can get out immediately. We can get out at this moment. Oh, you must see it. Tell me — shall it be?"

She faltered, stared. Her lips parted, the lower lip fell. "Oh, Gervase, what do you mean?"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Come, my beloved, come—

His words scorched her. "Fly, fly, fly — fly with me! We will go now — and forever. You shall leave these hard, bitter men — these glittering sepulchers of lies and vanity and sham. You shall come with me to Italy, my soul — you and I will be the only real persons in the whole world — live life to the full — the mind, the heart, the soul, the body, all intensely alive — quivering with life and light. Come, my beloved, come — this moment — come."

She was dreadfully frightened: her eyes were enormous, her mouth all drawn together to a mere bud. "Oh, my dearest, I could n't do that. Don't ask me that. Oh, no, no, no!"

He pressed her the closer, storming down her refusals. "But I do, I do, because I must."

She shut her eyes; she turned ashy white. This was the hour of fate. She had no strength to speak, but her lips framed the "No, no," unmistakably.

"You cannot? You refuse? I am to go?"

Desperate, poor soul, she nodded her head. He released her. He was as hard as iron, and as cold.

"Then the thing is over. I go. You have the right — you are to choose. For all that you have given me, I bless your name. For all that you are and must be — I give thanks to God."

He turned and left her. She was deadly calm

— white and fixed. Her eyes burned black, her lips were close, and colorless. With him, it seemed, went all that warmth which could give her color. He might have drained all her blood out and taken it with him in a bottle. She did not move, could not speak; but she looked after him so long as she could see anything — then began to rock to and fro. She put out her hands to steady herself, to balance on them as a bird on his wings, or a rope-dancer on his bending pole. Then she came to herself, saw her desolation, threw her arm against the tree for support, and, leaning her face into the crook of it, sobbed convulsively, and broke down. There she remained until she felt a hand upon her shoulder, and heard the Duke's voice.

He had been riding in the park, with only a groom. He had ordered it to be so. Cantering easily over the turf, his eye had caught sight of a tall man in black striding bareheaded towards the carriage-drive and lodge gate. "Oho!" He swept the horizon — with eyes like a windhover's. Then he turned to his groom. "I shall get off, and walk up to the house. Take my horse, and go straight to the stables." He dismounted and led his horse to the man, put the reins in his hand. "That 's your way," he told him, and pointed it out. It led him to the drive, well above the point where Gervase would cut into it on his tangent, directly away from where he saw the weeping Georgiana.

The man obeyed him and trotted off with the pair of animals. The Duke walked briskly over the grass.

Georgiana at his "My poor child, why did n't you tell me of your troubles? Come and cry on my shoulder"— obeyed him. He soothed her as a mother would a child unhappy.

X

LOCAL REMEDY

SHE took his arm, the drooping child that she seemed, beaten almost to a shade, and was grateful to him for his silence. He said nothing at all, but patted her hand from time to time, and when she was recovered, devoted himself to her for the rest of the way with a simplicity which was highly honorable to him. He told her stories, cracked jokes, rallied her — got her into a more rational mood.

Charles had seen them coming from the library windows. There he sat with his despatch-boxes and secretaries, immersed in business, but with his brain on fire. He was suffering damnable things. His pale face and hollow cheeks, his lantern jaws and great burning black eyes showed it. But he possessed infinite capacities of endurance it seemed. And so, sighing, he compressed his lips and turned to his business. When the Duke came into the room he was received with his junior's usual urbane deference.

Lancelot was in this extraordinary position that, really loving his wife, and desperately jealous of the Duke's position with regard to her, he was incapable of hating the Duke. He admired his parts and respected them, he adored his greatness as much as ever he had, and saw no career so attractive as that of being at his right hand, and, if need were, of falling by his side in the Armageddon to come. For Charles believed, as the Duke certainly did, that the struggle for Reform meant death to the old order in England, and that the aristocracy must die in their ranks, even as the French nobility had done in the Terror.

But there was another side to Charles. He was a morbid man, a sensitive man, but a just one. He could not deny to himself that he had desired this friendship, and had done his best to procure it — for his own ends. He had hoped that Georgiana would attract the Duke, had invited it. Now that it was done, how could he, in common justice, blame her or her lover? He knew that he could not. Lover as he was, he must go on loving, and see his beloved give herself to his patron. He could be nothing but agonized — but he could not cease loving either of the guilty ones.

For guilty they must be. For what other conceivable reason had she separated herself? For what other reason had they gone into Wake House? There could be none. He had been betrayed by the two persons whom he loved best in the world — and yet he went on loving them both. Was ever such a position held by a man of honor before?

He was a man of honor. He would have died sooner than injure his wife, and would spend his last ounce of blood in the Duke's service. Really, though he was in torment, he admitted the Duke's right — as that of a Lord of the Earth, as that of a being superior to the ties and liens of human kind — to take what naturally fell to him. Had it been his own right hand, he would have given it. It was his heart which his master now required — and he must have it. A loyaller soul than Lancelot's did not exist in this world.

He viewed his own act now — not as inconceivable folly, not as a thing to be ashamed of — as a sacrifice to this loyal admiration for a great man. He had offered up his ewe lamb to his master's needs — and that his master had benefited by it was a kind of consolation. So it might console a victim, like Iphigenia, that by her blood a fate was averted, and in her dying eyes you might have seen a faint spark of thanksgiving.

The Duke came into the room in his usual brisk and cool manner. "Georgie 's overdone," he said. "I found her in the park. There 's nothing much amiss; but I have persuaded her to lie down. You 'd better go up to her presently

— but don't ask questions. Don't bother her. She's been strained, I think, with all this fuss."

Charles had started up. "If you will excuse me, I'll go to her now."

"As you please. She'll hardly have had time to compose herself. But as you please."

Charles bent again to his work. "I have put aside these letters for you to see. There seems some doubt as to whether we can count upon Lords Cantacute and Milsom. Milsom wishes to make his undertaking conditional — as you'll see."

"D—n him, does he though?" said the Duke, and sat to his letters.

He read, pished, pshawed, dictated half-a-dozen short replies to half-a-dozen inordinately long communications, then said, "Charles, go up to her. Treat her kindly — but I've no business to say that. You always do. I need n't tell you what I think of her." He looked up suddenly. "God bless you, Charles," and held out his hand.

Charles Lancelot took a short breath — struggled as if on the point of speaking, but resigned the effort. He grasped the Duke's hand and left the room.

He sped upstairs and knocked at his wife's door. The blinds were down, but he made out her slim figure crouched on the bed. He came to her on tiptoe, stooped over her, and touched her hair with his hand. " My love, I am distressed —" he began, but she stopped him.

" Don't be unhappy," she said. " I shall be better directly. I have a bad headache. The sun was very hot this morning. I think it struck me. The Duke was very kind." Then she put out her hand, " And so are you. You always are." That was literally what the Duke had said. It stabbed him.

But he took and held her hand; he could hardly see her through his misty eyes. All his soul strained towards her. Then suddenly he knelt by the bed and kissed her hand. " I am ever yours, my dearest — ever, ever yours." She heard him, she understood him in part, but his words had no conviction for her.

" Oh, you are very good to me!" she said. " Perhaps I can go to sleep. I don't know. You won't be surprised if I don't come down to luncheon, will you? Make my apologies, and tell them I don't want anything."

Charles was now on his feet. His emotions were under cover again. " Certainly, my love. I 'll call again later in the day. I do trust that you will sleep."

" I don't know that I can. I hope I can." She looked up at him. " Thank you for coming to me," she said, and nearly undid him. He choked his sob — strangled it at birth, then stooped over and kissed her forehead. She knew a sudden change of mood, or read in him something which she had never read before. She looked up sideways at him, then turned about and put her arm round his neck. She felt him shiver. For a moment she clung to him like a frightened child. If he had stayed with her all might yet have been well with him; but the poor fool did not know that. His habit of repressing himself crept over him again. "I pray that you may sleep," was what he said, and then he left her.

When he was gone she lay wide awake in a reverie that was not disagreeable, because it was perfectly vague. A faint aroma of tenderness seemed to float over her. Gervase and his wild love-making were far from her. She seemed hardly to miss him. Charles had loved her — Charles had been kind to her again! Perhaps she had just begun to learn Charles — all the implications of his severe conduct were to be discovered. Could that be true? Did Charles love her?

It was very odd that Gervase was so little in her thoughts. She whipped her mind back to the park — to the trees and the burnt white acres of grass, to the buzzing of insects and the puffs of hot wind. Then she saw him again with his fierce inspired face — his tragic mask and gray eyes which seemed to flame. She felt his arms, his breath, his kisses. Her brain swam, the room spun round. At the back of her mind she heard, like a bell on a rock at sea, the Everlasting Nay. "Lawlessness is not for thee — no more of that. Seek thy happiness in the Mean. Husband and child, husband and child. Seek them, seek them, seek them."

As one navigating swift rivers of water between shoals, she listened to that warning bell, and took comfort in it. Charles gained. With the strong sounds in her ear she fell asleep.

Downstairs Charles was with the Duke. Their positions were strangely reversed. Charles, who should have been accuser, was accusing himself. The Duke, who should have been defendant, was judge and jury. The Duke sat upright at the table, drumming his fingers lightly. Charles, with bent head and hands locked closely behind him, walked the floor.

He had begun by formal excuses of his impertinence. "I feel that I abuse your friendship, if I may call it that, by intruding my personal affairs upon you. Believe me, nothing but their pressure could persuade me —"

"Go on, Charles." That, according to the

Duke, should be sufficient encouragement to any man born. But it was not enough for Charles.

" It is very difficult, you know. I may seem to be criticizing one whom it would be persumptuous in me —"

" Do you mean me, pray? My dear friend, you may say what you please of me. But I thought you were going to talk about your wife."

" I confess to that. I am disturbed about her, and have been for some time. Probably you know that I have lost her confidence — I don't know whether she may have told you —"

The Duke blinked. " She never speaks of you to me; but I have eyes in my head."

" She has been unlike herself of late. She has had alternating moods, now up, now down. But I have not felt able to invite that which there has been no disposition to concede. I am venturing to appeal, therefore, to you. It is humiliating, you must allow; but I feel that I ought to be humiliated —"

" Pish ! " said the Duke. " That 's a d—d foolish sort of feeling for any man to have. Let me get to the bottom of this. You think that Georgie 's in love with me, I take it. Well, I can settle that for you in two words. She is not. I know that by the best evidence in the world."

Charles dropped his lower jaw, and seemed unable to pick it up again. He looked grotesquely helpless.

"Let me tell you this, my friend," the Duke went on — and in such a way that he seemed to be accusing his accuser when he ought to have been defending himself. "I have been head over heels in love with her ever since I saw her. Make no mistake about that. I am still, and expect I always shall be. She 's very fond of me — she admits that; but for all the good she can do to my complaint I might be her grandfather. Now, I 'll tell you this. I have made love to her in my day, as I have to other women. But she 's not like other women. She put me in my place. She would n't have anything to say to me. She did it, upon my soul, in the neatest way I ever heard tell of. It was a great scene. Without a word of indignation, without a lot of talk about virtue (which they never mean), without a tear, or a flashing eye, or a colored cheek, she did it. And I let her be. She beat me hollow. And the moment she 'd done it she jumped up with her arms about my neck and gave me a kiss. God bless her; she 's all gold. And I 've never made love to her from that day to this. And that was two years ago. Now, I 'll tell you another thing, my young friend."

He had just lifted his admonishing forefinger, when Charles lifted his bruised head.

"One moment, please. You have told me what I had imagined. I have never doubted my wife's honor. You have confirmed my beliefs — and I am deeply obliged to you. But I must make my confession. I earnestly desired her acquaintance with you — I sought to begin it, I cherished its beginnings — for my own advantage. I admonished her — God forgive me — to make the most of it. I —"

"You might have spared yourself the trouble, my dear Charles," said the Duke. "She had me in a net the very first time I saw her — the little witch-wife that she is. So you made her a lure? To catch me? My dear Charles, I 'm very glad you succeeded. I 'm very much obliged to you. She 's been an enormous happiness to me — and you 're the best *aide* I ever had. I 'll add this. If you made her a friend of me — she made me a friend of yours. I ask no better."

Charles was much moved. "I cannot sufficiently thank you, Duke."

"Don't thank me, my friend," he was told. "You 've only yourself to thank. Do you take me for a fool? Do you suppose that I should have employed you because I loved your wife? You never made a greater mistake than that — if so it be. Why, man, do me justice for common sense. I 've got the business of this d—d blundering old country to do. I can't afford jobs on a pretty woman's account. No, no. Leave all that to the Duke of York. You might as well ask me to say that you threw your wife at my head for the sake of £1200 a year."

"As God lives," said Charles, "that is untrue. It has been the aim of my life to serve under you."

"I think that very true. You 're a gentleman, Charles, though you 're not much of a hand with women. Now let me tell you something. If you don't make love to your wife, somebody else will, so sure as you were born. That 's common reason. But I 'll add to that, that it won't be me. No, no. She won't have me." He rose. "I tell you that I 'm in love with her. She 's an angel. By nature she 's as bright as the sun on a fine May morning; and she 's as good for a man as that, every bit. She 's too good for me, I know — and she 's probably too good for you. But she 'll follow the law, you 'll find. You trust her — and so do I. But it 's common justice that we should make her happy between us — the barest justice. We owe her that. Damme, sir, if two men can't make a woman happy between 'em, they ought to be sent to jail!"

Charles turned away his face; but the Duke did not misinterpret the action. He went on.

"She 's young, and full of health, and great-spirited, and full of pretty thoughts and fancies which we can only guess at — grope after. Give her her fling, my dear fellow. She 'll come back. Trust her, enjoy the sight of her, laugh with her, — revel in her grace. By God, I 've had to teach myself that. And I 've done it! I wish her happy — and happy she shall be, for me, though she run away with the first tinker's brat who makes eyes at her. Bless you, she won't do it. She 'll think of it — put her pretty head sideways — show the mischief spark in her eye — but she 'll stick to you and the law. You trust her. And for God's sake, no sour looks. Be ready for her when she comes. Damn it, Charles, she 's worth it. I can do it — so can you. Let 's be decent men about all this. I 'll tell you this. There could be no better news for me than that you and she were together again —"

He was a blunt man, this Duke of Devizes, and captain of old England (an England that died with him). He went further than I do in his particulars. But Charles wrung his offered hand — and then, by some innate feeling of respect for what was respectable — kissed it. The Duke disliked that.

"Now let 's get to work with these damned letters," he said. He always swore when he was moved — like a partridge on the defense, kicking up dust.

BOOK III

LOVE IN A MIST.

BOOK III

I

THE DUKE AT THE HELM

WHEN Georgiana returned to town, whither she went directly from the B——s', she found a canto of apologetics from Gervase, and within two hours of her arrival had him weeping on his knees, with his face upon hers. This young man was always *in extremis* — extreme of daring, extreme of self-humiliation, extreme of bliss or extreme of misery: you could never get him to perch amidships. He did not ask her for forgiveness, he extenuated nothing, he held to all that he had said as the only possible course for true lovers; but he was aghast at his own induracy and at the accursed fate which drove him to cause her suffering — and while he bewailed all this, he foresaw that it was to continue. That was why he wept. "Oh, my Saint, my Saint," he murmured between his sobs, "Oh, my Rose of Dawn! and this misery must go on. There 's no remedy — we are stricken — wounded, we run about showing our wounds. We ask for pity, and get cold looks. We say to ourselves, Can it be that men, that women, fed on the same milk, crowned with the same hope, conscious of the same destiny, can see us bleed and have no compassion? Alas, my beloved — and we are not allowed to die!" So he ran on, blowing into flame his own fire, and she sat with her hand in his hair, looking down upon him with divine gentleness, and a swelling heart, in the midst of which was a pain which seemed vocal, seemed to wail.

Her eyes were wide and had no tears. The case was beyond her tears; for she knew that he was right and that she could not help him. Nothing could be more certain to her than that she adored this fierce, hot-headed young man. She gloried in his genius, she took more pride in his discerning devotion than in all the tribute of the Duke's, in all the heady incense which floated up to her from that greatness on its knees. For she was able to discriminate. She knew very well that the Duke's greatness was not of the mind, and that the Duke's love for her did not proceed from the mind, was not of the soul at all. Gervase loved her body, she saw, because it informed her soul; Gervase desired it so ardently because by it alone he could unite his soul with hers. She and he were severed hemispheres. Yes, he was fatally right. There was no possible happiness — now — for them short of union.

Hard-eyed, envisaging the dreary scene of their torment, she sat and watched him.

But Gervase must be nourished, and hope was his food. If she could give him none, he must forage for himself; and even as he lay his mind ranged abroad, casting about for shreds of comfort. Of the suddenest he lifted his head and gazing, smiling into her woebegone face, he put his hands upon her shoulders. "You and I, my saint, have at least this certainty, that we cannot face, or think of, separation. Tortured we must be, but together. Is it not so?"

She could not speak, or take her eyes from him; she nodded her head. He embroidered the theme. He drank thirstily the slightest motion of her head. "They can never keep us apart. I don't know that they will try. That is hopeless."

She shook her head, still looking at him. "No, no, not now. I should die. You are all to me." He adored her motions; his pity for her dreariness was a sort of rapture. Gazing each at the other, speechless, they thrilled as they neared; then their lips met and held together — and then the ice about her heart broke up, and she fell abandoned into his arms and sobbed her heart out. Thus she awoke his manhood; he became the calm marshal of events, once more the arbiter of destiny. He sought not the impossible, resumed his old place of her sweet familiar, the one being on earth with whom she could be absolutely herself; and every sign that she gave him of her renewing ease was the call for one assurance the more that she might resume it. Their leave-taking was prolonged and tender. He claimed nothing that she could not give him, and clasping her to his heart proclaimed himself aloud the blessed of God. "I have your heart, I have your heart and soul! What is it to me that your divine body is withheld for a season? Let Nature have her mighty way with us two. Good-night, my sweet Queen, I go to write of you as a poet should." And so he left her — and so for many days, on every one of which they held this kind of intercourse, he met and parted from her. For Georgiana he was at his best in these chastened and serene moods wherein all that was fine in him, his imaginative chivalry, his humor, his unfailing tact and resource, had full scope. Tragic, fiercely animal, cold by reason of some secret wound, bitter, scoffing, arrogant, intolerant — she loved him in every guise, but never so much as when she could read the justification of her entire confidence in his friendly and affectionate eyes. He was writing of her freely, as he told her, at this time — and all was well with him for the moment. All went indifferent well, in fact, throughout the winter. There were few resumptions of that clamative, devouring mood of his, in which it seemed certain that he must eat her up — and such as there were, were momentary. No; he was writing, and all was well.

If all was well with him, it was well with her, and Charles got the benefit of that. Since her return to London she had been able to be charming to Charles. And he too, though harassed by his work, was in a good mood. Knowing nothing of Gervase, having no eyes for him, he had been much comforted by the Duke's frankness. He was still jealous whenever he saw the pair together; but his imagination was quieted. He did not leave the house with dreadful suspicion; he did not return to it with a sinking heart. If he had had time to envisage deliberately the state of his own case he would have found it pretty desperate. Georgiana was too friendly by half — too cool in her friendliness. He had very little knowledge of women, but enough to see that if a woman can afford to be friendly with you it is because she knows that you can't expect anything else of her. But he was too busy to think of all this — and besides that, he was of a cold temperament and did not burn for the renewal of his rights. So long as his sense of property was not outraged by evidence, he did not need immediate possession.

And really he was very busy. Parliament had resumed in November, had adjourned for a few days at Christmas, had met again early in the New Year, and was hatching a yeasty kind of an egg, it seemed, which (if it should burst of its ferment) might well blow the Duke and his friends out of office. Which, in fact, it did in February. Beaten over and over again in the Commons, the night came when he had to walk out of his own house in the face of certain defeat. That was what he did, and faced a Westminster Yard hoarse with injuries, filled with white and mocking faces, bristling with uplifted threatening fists. Stones were flying too, and the soldiery sent for. With Charles at his side, and a few more of his friends, the little great man stood coolly watching the stormy human sea.

He did not move a muscle of his face. His eyes were bright and unblinking. " By Gad, they don't love us just now. Time we were out of this," was what he said; and then, folding his cloak about him, he stepped coolly off the steps and made a way for himself. It was exactly as if a man dropped off a jetty into a swirling flood of water, to a certain death. Charles was behind him, undisguisedly anxious, not of the same heroic breed. It was not so much that he feared death, as that he cowered before hatred. Oddly enough, though he was the last man in the world to court popularity, that was in fact the very breath of his nostrils. To realize, as now he must, the loathing in which his king of men was held was terrible to him. "Down with the b—y tyrant! Down with Privilege! To Hell with the Duke!" Charles shuddered to hear. If he had had his wits about him, he would have taken comfort from the evident truth that fear was mingled with their hate. They saw that the man was beaten, but dreaded to gloat over that lest he should rise again on some third day. And positively, though they hovered about him, grinning their rage and desire, not a finger was laid upon him. They cursed him, they called for three groans, and one groan more; they reviled him with foul language and fouler implication. "Go to your women, you adulterer!" Charles heard with a mortal chill at the heart; and, "Into your seraglio, old Turk." The Duke was fabled to be of Turkish instincts — as indeed he was.

The little great man took it very coolly, and reached Wake House in capital spirits. "Well, Charles, that 's all over. I must go to Windsor to-morrow or Friday. Plague take the rascal that he keeps his bed down there. Why the deuce can't he lie-in in town, like a gentleman? Now we must go and tell Georgie the news. We 'll give her a holiday after this, Charles — by Gad we will. She 's been out of sorts this long while." Then they went into the house, and sought Georgiana in her drawing-room.

She was out, however, at a party, and came in some half an hour later, fully acquainted with the news. She came in, with high color and bright eyes, and went straight up to the Duke. "Is all well? You are not hurt? Either of you?" This was well meant, but rather unfortunate. The fact was she had not identified Charles with the disaster. The poor wretch felt that.

The Duke took her hands and gave her a kiss on the forehead. "All well, Georgie. No bones broken — and no hearts, I hope. Charles was with me."

She turned immediately to her husband. "Was n't it very alarming?"

He did his best. "No, my dear, no. The Duke was their master. It was extraordinary and very fine. Nobody knew me, I fancy."

She returned to the Duke. "Lord Alvanley came in and told me about it. I tried to get away, but they assured me that it was n't safe. Luckily I had an escort."

The Duke blinked; the corners of his mouth twitched. He knew who this escort was — Charles neither knew nor cared.

They discussed the offshoots of the affair in the leisurely, detached manner of those who have their conduct in their own hands. The popular tumult was taken as a factor of the problem, but almost as a negligible one. The Duke had never got out of the way of considering men as so much stuff, to use or discard as the moment chose. To him the country meant the King, and government the King's pleasure or convenience. For one or both of these you might have to use the mob, either by drilling them in battalions or scattering them with the musketry of already formed battalions: beyond that he was unable to consider them seriously. They were ignorant, they were blackguardly, they were at the mercy of demagogues whom he detested. He could not hate the mob, and scoffed at fear of it. Charles regarded the populace rather more closely. He considered it as the material of votes; and again he had the incurable belief of an official that it was a flock for his shepherding. Views, in a mob, were not to be thought of. His attitude was that of a clergyman who rises from his after-dinner port to minister at evening prayer, and to preach the virtues of strict temperance. In the present conjuncture, however, it was clear to both these politicians that resignation must follow. The Duke went by the temper of the House, meaning that of the Lords, Charles by the temper of the people as inflamed by the House of Commons. But Charles, the faithful shepherd, was troubled about the future, while the Duke looked only to the holiday ahead.

He broached it to his Egeria. "Italy, my dear, is the end of this. I think we 'll give ourselves a trip. What do you say to Florence, Rome, back to Venice — across the Alps to Basle; home by the Rhine? Now don't you think that worth a little mob-law?"

He was somewhat chilled to observe the frank dismay with which she received it. She stared, turned pale, faltered at the lips.

"Oh!" she said, "oh, I had no idea. Really, I don't know whether — But if you would like it, of course —" For the moment she had not been able to command herself, and when she could do it, and even feign enthusiasm jumping to meet his, it was too late. He had seen everything in a moment. Poor girl! she could not bear the thought of separation from her poet. The Duke was touched. It was pathetic — her dismay; but the summoning of her thin garrison at his command — to stand at attention, at the salute, late, faltering, shaking at the knees — that was a heart-rending spectacle.

He felt magnanimous, he beamed at her. "Yes, Georgie, we 'll go," he said. "We 'll make up a party of us. There 'll be you, and me, and Charles. And how would it be to take Caroline Gunner — and your poet, eh?"

He saw the flood of color, he saw her eyes flutter and dilate. He saw her fight for breath, watching her bosom. He determined that it should be.

Charles inquired. "Who is your poet, my dear? Do I know him?" He knew him, of course, perfectly well — but Charles was Charles.

She was able to say, "Oh, yes, quite well. He calls Mr. Poore my poet. But I don't know whether Mr. Poore could — leave his work."

"He 'll take it with him," said the Duke with a chuckle. "Reams of it."

Charles affected interest. "Does Mr. Poore follow the profession of poet? And does that advantage him in foreign travel?"

"It 's his raw material," said the Duke. "'Childe Harold' should have taught you that much."

Charles objected. "Lord Byron was a man of means and abundant leisure, Duke. This gentleman may be both, no doubt, but in that case, probably, I should have heard of him."

"Oh, you 'll hear of him one of these days," said the Duke. "Won't he, Georgie?"

Georgiana could now command herself. "I certainly think so myself. Mr. Poore has genius. It would be a great chance for him."

"Then by Gad he shall have his chance," said the Duke. "He shall come as my guest."

Georgiana turned away, and it was Charles who praised his Grace's generosity; but she felt it deeply, and knew that she would have an opportunity of repaying it as he would wish to be repaid. She had by this time found out in what queer channels his savor of her ran. But for the present she put out of mind her duties of debtor to creditor — all her thoughts hummed and sang of the joy of telling her lover what was in store for them both. Italy and Gervase! Those two who should be inseparables, never yet united. And she would see Italy dawn in Gervase's eyes, and catch the first sound of his singing, when he, like a young Memnon, shrilled with that morning glory! And then she caught a sight of herself by prevision, hand in hand with him, straying through the breaking landscape, spying for the first flowers, kissing the golden buds. And then she felt herself in his eager arms, and grew hot, and had the mist upon her eyes. With those misty, happy eyes she thanked her great friend, urging her face towards him as she wished him good-night; "Oh, you are kind to me," she whispered; and he smiled keenly at her, and would have kissed her, but that Charles was there. "Good-night, my dear — I 'll see you happy yet," contented him. He could wait for his payment until to-morrow — his payment, such as it was!

It ought to have been — and largely was — that he sent her dancing to bed — dancing, and singing messages to Gervase, to whom, through walls, over roofs anad chimney-pots, she kissed her hand a dozen times before she blew out her candle.

In the morning, having paid her dues, she told him what was in store. He took it gravely, almost as a right; but he held her long and closely in his arms.

II

ITALY AND THE LOVERS

A DUKE cannot travel simply, if he would; and our duke would have maintained (and been right in maintaining) that, traveling as he did, he used to the utmost the simplicity proper to dukes. A traveling carriage with four horses, accordingly, conveyed the party; another, with two horses, the servants — Georgiana's maid, Lady Caroline's, the Duke's body-servant, courier and lackey; finally, a groom on horseback had charge of two led animals in case any of the gentlemen should wish to ride. The Duke rode, in fact, for his allotted number of hours in each day; Charles Lancelot rode for hours on end; Gervase never, but sat with Georgiana in the carriage, or strode by wild paths alone, taking short cuts over mountain, plain, by river and thicket as the mood took him. Later on the journey he used to beguile his mistress into companionship on these adventures; but she was not equipped for them, nor prepared, and seldom went far. So now the reader has material for picturing the dusty, jolting apparatus which dragged across the length of

France, clattering and sliding through the cobbled streets of Meaux and Compiègne, Nevers and Avignon, through the wooded ways of Fontainebleau, by the great rivers, the airy slopes, the long white vistas of road, into the drab and burnt hill country of Province. Throughout the journey, and so onwards into Italy, the Duke never varied in any one particular his habits of home. He rose at seven and breakfasted on tea and toast. He worked with Charles at the papers and letters which pursued him until ten. He rode till twelve, sat with Georgiana till two, lunched, had his nap, worked or read till it was dark, conversed at large with his friends, dined at eight, expected to be amused until ten — and to bed on the stroke. The retinue, the two coaches, the guests, the innkeepers and their hinds were all subservient to this routine, which suited him and was strictly maintained.

Georgiana with gentle humor did her full share of its upkeep, Lady Caroline saw it all as a matter of course: a healthy, fresh-colored young woman with straw-colored hair and quantities of it, she had all the tact with which her caste is born, and that intense instinct for smoothness of life which is its most distinctive quality, and accounts for its strength and weakness at once. She had left a husband and children at home and spoke of them with affectionate interest frequently, but without enthusiasm. Charles Lancelot, of course, ministered like a priest of the altar — but Gervase fumed and raged. Incredible servitude of this absurd gentleman! he would cry — who by a nod of the head could shake himself free of his degrading habits, but, instead, settled his neck deeper into the yoke, and paid through the nose that it might be chained the faster to his old shoulders. There were, according to him, but two ways to travel: one for the family — the holy way; one for the pair. As for the first, the pattern was to be seen in the Flight into Egypt. "If you were indeed mine, my soul, and if you had given me the pledge of the sacrament without which no woman has her seal of election — I would take you into Italy, meek and riding upon an ass, your child and mine upon your lap. I would walk beside you, cheering the way. No road would be too long, no labor too rough — for every step would be taken in joy, and every rock removed would be a work of love. Oh, the happy, long days — oh, the nights of rest in your holy arms!" What would she say to this but, "Ah, my dearest!" or how reply but by nestling into his arms?

The second way was that of free companions — companions errant, not yet approved for the high estate of parentage. Here the noble walked breast to breast, with no thought but in present joy, with no gear but love in the heart. These were the prime essentials out of which the others — secondary but very real — would engender themselves. Song would flow unbidden from the lips, zest would follow on an appointed round —zest for sleep after toil, zest for toil after sleep, zest for the fruits of love — calm, confidence and peace of mind; and from them zest for love again. "Put beside these necessaries — this bread and this wine of life — the Duke's carriage, lackeys, hamper of state, and you see to what the poor man has come. And we! — ah, faint-hearted ones, what are we doing with two carriages, nine horses, and a horde of camp-followers?" What could she do but wonder and admire?

She defended her exalted friend, speaking warmly of his benevolence and greatness of soul, and it is only fair to both of them to say that the Duke defended himself with ability when Gervase attacked him to his face, which he by no means scrupled to do. An odd thing is that the pair got on excellently well. They sparred, but appreciated one another, and each found the inherent simplicity which each had a bond. The Duke, of course, had his way. Not even Gervase, born a mutineer, could dispute it. Indeed, he found himself ministering like one of the household, and within a few days would have expected, with all the rest of them, the Heavens to rain blood if the soup was not on table at eight o'clock in the evening. But the young poet liked the man of great affairs, talked to him freely, rated him soundly, on politics, on morals, scorned his opinions of art and letters, and took the drubbings he frequently got in very good part. On one subject they understood each other without a word said. Gervase was an inordinate lover, no doubt, but he had discernment, and was quick to realize the exact state of the case between the Duke and the lady of his heart. "He knows the length of his tether; he gets his pleasure of her in the contemplation of her. He 's a better lover than I am. That, indeed, is as near perfection as a lover who is not loved can go." And the Duke, who watched him with his bright, hawk's eyes, saw nothing to disapprove in the ardent ways of this young man with his favorite. He spoke very frankly of the situation to Lady Caroline Gunner. "Don't you suppose that that pair is in Puy de Dôme with us. Not a bit of it. They are in the Elysian Fields, hand in hand, with the asphodel brushing their knees."

Lady Caroline nodded. "One sees it, of course; It 's rather flagrant, don't you think? But very innocent, I 'm sure. What does Mr. Lancelot think about it?"

"He does n't think about it — and I 'm not going to let him begin. I like Charles: he 's useful to me. But he 's no use in the world to her. I told him once that I was in love with his wife, and that there 'd be the devil in it if we could n't make her happy between us. Of course, he could n't deny that."

"I don't suppose he could," Lady Caroline agreed; "but I don't suppose, either, that he cared about it."

"You can't tell with Charles," said the Duke, "he 's so damned sophisticated. He 'll never talk, for fear of letting himself know what he thinks of himself." There he had Charles to the life.

Lady Caroline felt it incumbent upon her to protest ever so slightly. "I do think they are rather flagrant, as I said before. Simplicity is all very well, and I like it. But he kisses her hand! But they can't keep their eyes off each other! It 's very beautiful, I know — but is it perfectly decent?"

The Duke shrugged, then rubbed his chin.

"I never was a very decent man, myself," he said, "but I often think that the most indecent thing in the world is a pair of br—, let me say, shutters. And Tartufe was the worst blackguard ever put on the stage. Good God, Caroline, if you and I can't live in the Age of Gold, we wish we could, I expect. I know that I do, at all events." Eight o'clock struck; his Grace was served; his Grace went in to dinner, immaculately dressed. The guests followed; but Georgiana turned down the collar of Gervase's coat before they entered the dining-room. He wore it so as a protest, he cried out. She put her hand over his mouth.

There remains to be considered Charles; Charles, that son of Misfortune, Charles with his assumptions, the enigma of this tale. One gets him best, I think, by a roundabout way, looking at him as a part of one of the pictures which Georgiana shared in daily. Each picture contained a pair of figures, with characteristic grouping — for there may be seen in one or another the cheerful buxomness of Lady Caroline Gunner with her smoothed fair hair, her ample bosom, and everlasting crochet needles. In the first picture, then, sits Georgiana with a book on her knee, opened but not read, while the Duke, standing by her, stiff as a ramrod, close-buttoned and high-stocked, speaks over her head, kindly, incisive, desperately frank. In the second she reads deeply, and pinches her lip; near by is Charles, also sitting, not reading, not speaking, shading his tired eyes with his hand. I believe that he has schooled himself not to think in these rare times of relaxation. So at any rate he will sit for an hour or more until Georgiana sighs, looks up from her book, and asks him the hour.

He gets out his watch, fixes his glasses, and tells her. She rises slowly, thinks she will go to bed, hopes that it will be fine to-morrow, that the horses will be rested. He echoes all these aspirations with his " Yes, indeed, my love," or, " Ah, to be sure — that is important." She comes to him, stoops, kisses his forehead, and leaves him. He sits on for another spell, not moving, shading his eyes from the light.

In the third picture, which the warm southern night shrouds in violet, Gervase has her close in his arms. Her face is as pale as her gown, her eyes are as bright as the great wet stars. She is tiptoe to be nearer to him, and her lips drink of his. There is never a third to this picture, though Gervase would care nothing if there were.

Charles, the harassed gentleman, had no suspicion of Gervase, and thought little about him. He disapproved of him, root and branch, found his nerves on edge very frequently, had nothing to say to him, or of him, and nothing to learn. He was no longer jealous of his patron and friend; even he with all his morbid sensibilities could have had no ground for such doubts after the conversation of the previous autumn. At the present moment his despair of himself, of his power of being to his wife what he had — alas for him — assumed too readily he once had been and must always be, had settled into a deep and persistent melancholy from which his routine-work only could rouse him. At his desk he was the alert and vigilant official he had always been; the moment he left it he became what you have seen him in the picture. He had his small talk, his elaborate locutions, his fund of anecdote to veil himself withal in company. Alone with the Duke he was affable, courteous and resourceful. Lady Caroline liked him exceedingly and never found him dull: but that was because she talked nineteen to the dozen herself. With Georgiana, and with her only, he was frozen into numb silence. She was a perpetual reproach to him; she witnessed to his conscience damning evidence against him. "Here," she seemed to cry out, "in my heart is the man who won me; I know what he was, what he told me, what I believed. And there — sitting glum and speechless yonder — is the changeling who claims me now. I cry the mercy of the Court." What Court, thought he in his ruth, could deny it her? He felt, poor wretch, like a convict before her, and like a convict despicable for his failure in crime rather than for his crime. Why, he had had the love of this woman! She had admired him, worked for him! He had been the only man in her horizon — and now! And now he could not open his mouth to her. He went before her hangdog, cowed, a cur. His courage was gone. In his heart he knew that he could never cope with her again. The conviction which had agonized him before now turned him to despondency.

But in the great affair of life — the affair of mating — there 's no allowance made. Either you can or you can't, and there 's an end. The Duke was sorry for Charles and called him "poor devil." He might have been sorry for himself too, but was not. Gervase, on the other hand, abhorred the poor man, and called him jelly-fish. He roundly declared that he would infinitely rather see Lancelot fiercely the lover of his wife, than know her legally in the power of such a lump of protoplasm as he showed himself to the world. Observers — and there were two at least — expected that the day must come which between Lancelot and Poore would be a day of reckoning.

But the train of carriages and horses and baggage wagons straggled across France, carrying with it well concealed from the natives its private concerns, presenting only the bold English front, with its royal disregard of money and calm acceptance of the best that money can do, which in any other nation than ours would seem to indicate madness. They observed Monseigneur riding his roan beside the great *berline* in which sat the ladies of his family, the one so large and placid who smiled and bowed to right and left as her needles flew, the other slim, elegant and pale, whose eagerness was concealed, whose beauty was of so rare and fragile a type. They saw Charles riding beside his chief and supposed him for what he was; but what did they make of Gervase, that wild, broad-shouldered young giant of the flushed face and tumble of pale hair forever flying over his eyes, forever tossed back? Those who saw him with the frail lady had no difficulty at all, but to them among whom he strode, flaming-eyed, muttering to himself, to whose children he stooped to lift them to his shoulder, to whose dogs he was friendly in a foreign tongue, he was an unrelated apparition. A tutor? A musician? Perchance a poet? Did Monseigneur then nourish a poet? To hymn the deeds of Monseigneur? To amuse the idle hours of his ladies? Ah, *ça!* the English might do stranger things than that.

Sometimes he persuaded Georgiana to walk with him: he would very seldom sit in the carriage, for Lady Caroline bored him to outrage. The poor lady's optimism seemed to him the most arrogant thing he had ever dreamed of. He called it her ointment, and declared that she rolled in it every morning before breakfast. But Georgiana lived before the day of Oread-ladies and soon tired, though she felt that she could fly if he would but hold her hand. He took her on a wild adventure in Province, lost the way, and had her out amongst rocks and box bushes till far into the night. It was luckily warm and still, and she thought it the most glorious experience she had ever had. But the Duke was very cross and Charles out scouring the countryside until near midnight. Lady Caroline said that it was the first time she had ever seen Mr. Poore at a loss for words; but it is to be remembered that she had not heard him with Georgiana.

They reached Italy in mid-April, traveled by the famous sea-road, and were in Florence by May. Here the Duke had hired a Medici villa and kept great state. The poet was kept from his beloved and grew restive. Whereupon Georgiana lost flesh and showed her collar-bones.

III

GENIUS LOCI

GERVASE declared that he felt the entry into Italy by some subtle stirring of the blood, which changed his human vesture and reduced him from the state of civilized, black-coated man to that infinitely finer thing, the unsophisticated child of Nature. Whether that were so or not — and Georgiana believed it to be true — whether he could ever have been considered civilized in our ordinary understanding of civic being, certain it is that from Genoa onwards he ceased to accept the Duke's hospitality. When the party was settled at the Villa Medicea on the bosky slopes of Fiesole, he was understood to be occupying a cave in the woods which hide the Mensola from vulgar eyes. He never appeared in company at the Villa; he was seldom seen by any of the inhabitants of it; his rare visits to them were of the nature of monitions of storm. He stalked about the shrubberies, scowling, with folded arms; he lectured Lady Caroline upon the frivolity of her pursuits, not as loving whom he chastened by any means, but using the language of lofty indignation, becoming, no doubt, to a god, but unacceptable by the daughter of a marquis and wife of a baron from the son of a half-pay officer. The Duke was very much amused, and sought still more diversion in drawing the young man out; but Gervase would have none of his dry comments. Gervase regarded him just now as the jailer of Georgiana, and had him in horror. He told his perplexed mistress that her name should be more properly Susanna. "I shudder," he said, "I burn for your shame, that you should be here — maintained here — to feed the eyes of these horrible persons. And beyond your prison walls, outside this madhouse of a villa, is Italy, baring her warm breasts, holding open her generous arms to shelter you and me." What could she do but stare pitifully with her great eyes at the gilded gateways of the Medicea, and long for the milk of the breasts of Italy?

He was there morning and evening — in the cypress alleys of the garden, or among the smoky olives of the *podere* where the tulips and purple anemones washed her feet as she walked girdled with his arm. For she came out to him soon after dawn and stayed with him until the sun was high, and there were few of the close star-strewn nights when she had to content herself with long looks and whispered words from the balcony of her chamber. Gervase, who had taken only too kindly to Italy, was all for a ladder of rope; but the thought revolted her, and she forbade it. "Not here, my dearest, not here! I dare not — I feel that it would be horrible. It would be treachery." He groaned and protested that it was plain duty, on the contrary. Treachery! He blazed out at the word. "Ah, but you seek to make me a traitor to God."

"To God, dear heart!" she faltered; and he held to it.

"To no less a one. Love is the highest passion we have, and the noblest. It is our inheritance from on high, and leads us directly back to the heights. Many are called, few chosen. But you and I, my soul, you and I have felt the call. How dare we deny our vocation? What earthly convention, what miserable badge of our degradation can be suffered to hold us back? You talk of treachery — and I say, God keep us from treachery!"

"The man has marked you," he said again — referring, if you please, to Charles. "The man has marked you for his — as drovers brand their cattle, or punch the ears of their ponies. To my mind that is so horrible a fact that fire from Heaven can scarcely burn it out. What vainer thing could the people imagine than that man should have property in woman, in that vase of election towards which all holiness in man must tend if it would live? It is as if you were to plunge a flower in sugar and expect it to be filmy and graciously open-hearted, fragrant and fresh as once it was, before the devastating hand was laid upon it. Will men never understand that their kingdom is not of this world, nor women either?" He covered his eyes. "I worship in you the dear spirit of God. I would not dare to touch you if I did not believe that I, and I alone, had been chosen from the beginning for your mate." And then he took her. "Mated we are, my heart, in a nobler world than this, a world where dukes are not, nor Treasury officials, but free spirits roaming at large upon their everlasting commerce of contemplation, ecstasy, noble rage: divine business where passion is seen for what it really is, the Godlike energy driving us forth to our work of creation. For we too, my soul, are gods, and it is ours to seek beauty and to make it. Nothing should hinder us from that — it is our only justification for being here at all. We wrong God, stultify Him, make Him a fool, if we falter and draw back." And then his hot whispering smote at her ears —"Ah, my love, come — come soon, deny me not!" And what could she do but shiver when, having torn herself from him, she returned into the great splendid house and found Charles at one end of the room, shading his eyes with his hand, while he perused state papers or some foolish sheet of news of things already done? Or what was she to think of the Duke impatient for his bed, yawning through a game of piquet with Lady Caroline? Gervase had driven home his doctrine: these things were less than nothing, vainer than the bubbles of scum which froth upon a pond.

She lived, poor lady, a double life in these days. Every morning after her secret communication with her lover, she received a letter in which the words seemed to scald her heart as she read them. Every day she had a sonnet; every night she saw, if she could not speak with, him. Unmarked by herself her aspect towards the common life of every-day inanity changed. She dwelt apart, if not like the star he proclaimed her, then like an alien from the common lot. But as her self-command was infinitely above that of Gervase, as that of any woman is above that of any man, she went through the duties of her place with a quiet courage which should have made her lover love her more — but, instead, shocked him into silence. It often happened that what she had driven herself to do in public with all her nerve, she had to undo for his peace of mind — with a reinforcement (brought up somehow) of nerve. So she was forever dressing up her soul for the vulgar and stripping it again to show her secret spouse that all was well with her beauty, and that the flame upon the altar of her heart burned clear behind the trappings and weeds. And then — to the masquerade anew! Her endurance was wonderful, but the breaking-point could not be far. The spell of Italy, the soft invitation to surrender with which its mild blue skies, its radiance, its fecund heat wooed her every sense; and its tribute to beauty at every street corner, in every cloister, over every shrine; its sanction to passion, its idolatry of love (as indeed what Gervase preached it) — against all this, and with her heart alight, with her body quivering for caresses, her lips athirst, her eyes never yet filled — against all this, what could she do? Now she dallied with the thought. It was possible, yes, it was possible that the perfect life could be lived — here and soon. Not now — oh, not now — but soon!

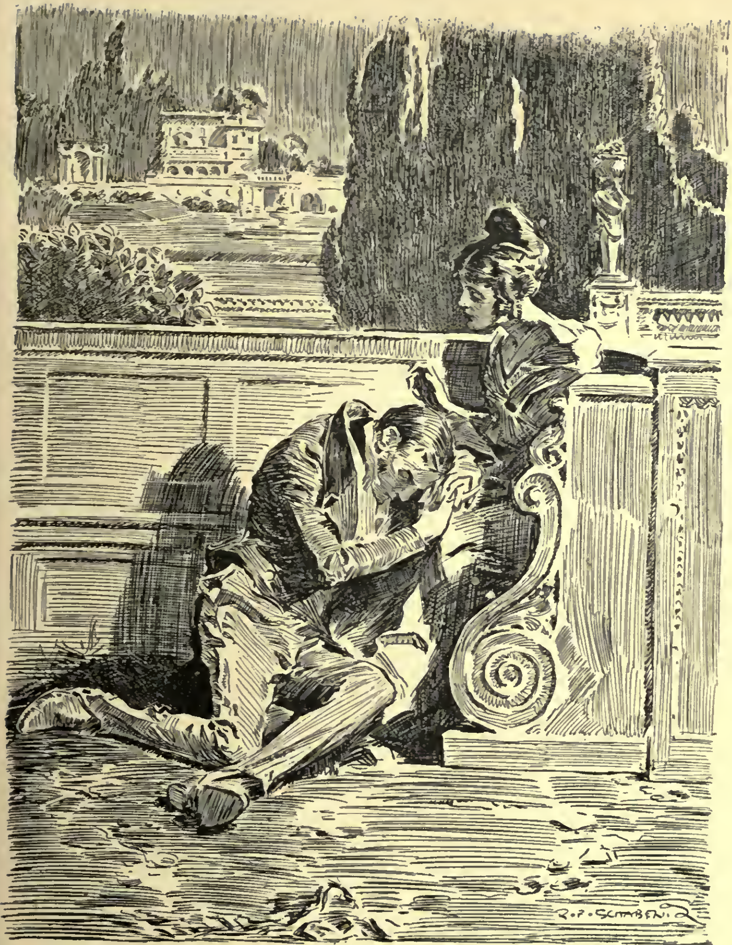
Gervase, for his part, saw nothing for it but to take her away, and the sooner the better. His case was this — that here was a young and beautiful creature being starved to death of the proper food of all of us. Now starvation may be acquiesced in where there is necessity, as there is when no food can be had. You do not then call Nature murderess, but you say the gods so decree. But if the food is there, are you a robber if you take the famished to where it is? The idea is absurd. In this case Georgiana was starving and Gervase could feed her, he and no other. It seemed to him his plain duty. To accomplish it, therefore, to save her soul alive, he had to do violence to his respect for her gentleness; he had to insist, to harp, to overbear. Also he must keep his eyes open for opportunity — and he did.

The Duke's party was to leave Florence in the middle of May and betake itself to a castle in the Apennines where the summer heats would be tempered by breezes. From thence he thought the deed might be done. Complete visionary as he was, he had no definite idea in his head. He supposed that they would go by night, and would go north. Lake Garda struck him by its name, and its association with Catullus. He would read the poet to her there. He had no expectation of being followed, but in any case would not dream of concealing their whereabouts. If the Duke came after them he should have to use reason and foresaw himself successful; if Lancelot, he should know how to deal. Indignation would help him there; for of the two men, if the Duke made him fume, Lancelot outraged his moral sense as a blasphemer of the holiest. Lancelot represented the abominable law by which a girl, having been cajoled into a union with a man, hateful in its very essence, could be compelled by the prestige of custom to yield to him when her experience and growing sense told her heart that it was horrible. The

Duke at least had won her mature regard — but as he had and could have nothing else, one could treat him more gently. There was no reason why the Duke should not continue in her friendship or supply any need to her which she lacked — should there be any. But he smiled as he thought of that, and judged that there would be none. He was a confident young man in most things, but in nothing more absolutely confident than in his possession of Georgiana's heart and mind.

For the future he took no thought at all. Whether Georgiana had money of her own or not, whether, if she had any, it was in her own disposal; how far his own resources could be stretched; by what means one was to live without an income — of these things not a shadow of concern. Literally he confined his preparations to supplying the material of the only pictures which he saw in front of him. He saw a tall machicolated wall, trees on one side of it, a long white road on the other, fading into a far distance of clouds and mountain peaks. At a point of place stood a carriage, at a point of time Georgiana came tiptoe through the gate, and fell with sighs into his arms. He cheered her with kisses — her lips were cold — and high words which brought the love into her eyes; he helped her in, sat beside her; she clung to him, hid her face. The whip cracked, the horses flew; together they looked forward, and presently saw the dawn steal up over the edge of the world. The sun shone upon his beloved, appeased, asleep in his arms. And their life together, as he foresaw it, was to be one long vigil, and one great fruition, a miracle of grace perpetually awaited and infallibly vouchsafed. He saw nothing else; and if obstacles had been pointed out to him would have laughed them to scorn. This is not very curious, perhaps; but what *is* curious is that if he could have kept himself, or been kept by his genius, at this high pitch all or any obstacles would have been scornworthy.

To him, with his fiery intellect and ungoverned emotions, love was a furious possession. He himself became a chariot in the holding of a god. He shook under his driver as a man in a fever; he drove now this way, now that, now high, now low — but always straight to the mark. He was capable of the wildest flights, of the most incongruous labors. There was no summit of human activity to which he could not have attained. He could have been prime minister with ease, have led armies across Europe, have managed the Bank of England. These were his times of exaltation, when he was irresistible. But there were others, when he was momentarily emptied of his tenant, and could do nothing — could neither write, nor speak, nor make love. A lethargy lay upon him;


R·F·SCHABELITZ

The sun to him was dark, and silent was the moon.

his eye lacked luster, his hue was leaden, his blood seemed mud. The sun to him was dark, and silent was the moon; vast and unheaving, barely quivering he lay, until his demon returned from coursing abroad.

Such violent alternations made Georgiana no fatter. Poor soul, she must agonize in either case. With all the mind, she had not the vitality to cope with him. Half-heartedly she panted after him when he led her sweeping through the sky; she exhausted herself in efforts to put spirit into him when he lay, an inert mass, by her knees. She herself, seated by her nature gently in the mean, could neither realize his elation nor fall into his despair. She could have smiled to herself when he addressed her as a supernatural being, if she had not been too much frightened. Alas, she suspected that she was loved by yet another phantom, the victim of new and huge assumptions. He was of the fairy kind, this new spirit, incalculable, wayward, and possibly as ruthless as any of his race. Her charity was abounding; her love and consideration for him inexhaustible; but it is the fact that although he could be more tender than any woman, he could also be merciless upon occasion, condemning with one tremendous sweep of the hand her life, her conscience, her convincing duties. It meant everything in the world to her, this love of his; but deep in her heart she had the conviction that it could not last. Such wild commerce was not for her.

And yet the assumption was made, and she was to suffer it to take its course, and gather her up in the whirlwind to be made by its beating wings. In moments of perplexity she looked wistfully to the Duke. Would he give her counsel? Dare she ask it of him? But she always shook her head. It would be disloyal to Gervase, as implying distrust. She must tread her way alone.

Of Charles she thought scarcely at all. There was no room in her heart for more than one at a time, and that poor gentleman had never made himself at home there.

So the time drew near when the great Assumption was to be made.

IV

FONTEMAGRA

THE Castle of Fontemagra, with the chestnut woods and the cascade of the Magra for which it is famous, is in the Lunigiana and commands a magnificent western prospect. The bay of Spezzia lies below it; but so deeply below that you would suppose a stone's throw would give you a splash of white in the blue for your pains. The domains cover two hills — the Magra upon its short course runs between. The roads fork from a crucifix about a mile below the Castle: one goes to Chiavari and so to France; the other into Lombardy. The house itself is very fine — a medieval fortress, which Della Spina defended against Castruccio, and where a later and more fortunate Castruccio, the Corsican, Bonaparte (as the Duke always called him, to Gervase Poore's dismay and disgust), stayed more than once during the Italian campaign; a medieval fortress with later additions, Renaissance, post-Renaissance, and frank eighteenth-century imitation pasteboard. The reception rooms should be measured by the acre; the bedrooms would each contain a family.

For those who like the Italian style of garden, an art for the stonemason rather than the gardener, I don't know that Fontemagra could be beaten. The way down from the great terrace to the fork in the road, for example (not the carriageway, which goes in enormous spirals of half a mile each, but the footway), is constructed in a series of broad flights of steps relieved by vast amphitheaters of marble balustrades and statues, backed by cut ilex hedges twenty feet high. There are perhaps eight or a dozen of these grandiose resting-places; to them alternately the steps converge, from them alternately dilate. More magnificent approach to a stately building can hardly be imagined. From the midmost of them a broad walk leads you to the Cascade of the Magra, whose roar in times of flood can be heard from every room in the castle a thousand feet above it.

The Devizes party installed itself in this princely habitation in May, intending to spend the summer, and brave out the summer heats. It was understood that the Duke intended to devote his leisure to the preparation of his memoirs, and that Charles Lancelot was to give his mind to them. The honest man took the understanding with that seriousness which was his whole justification. Georgiana would have been much interested, but for the urgency of her own affairs.

Lady Caroline had just gone home to her family, and Gervase stalked the woods, coming and going fitfully. At the end of May he disappeared altogether. Georgiana, it was supposed, knew where he was. As a fact, she heard from him daily.

During the first week in June, by which time the military routine which was essential to the Duke's well-being had been completely established, she hardly left him for an hour in the day. She said very little to him — nothing indeed of her affairs; but seemed ill at ease if she was away from him, and to like when they were together to take his arm, or give him her hand to hold. He noticed it, of course; he watched her closely, even expected momently that she would confide in him; but she never did that. It was on the tip of his tongue to provoke her to break her silence — he judged it would be easy; but two considerations, one sentimental and one sensual, checked him. It seemed to him a brutality to explore her heart; and this clinging affection gave him extreme pleasure. Its very dumbness excited him; its flattery appealed to his imagination, just as the touch of her stirred his sense. It was like the unexpected attentions of a child given to one who is childless and too much aware of it. The days went slowly, the woods invited her, Gervase, he knew, could not be far off; but yet she would not leave him. She brought him his morning tea and toast with her own hands, sat with him while he took it; was ready for him when he took his walk up and down the terrace, in the still hours, misty with promise, before the sun came streaming over the mountain tops and bade the world be still, left him then only for Charles and the memoirs; rode with him in the woods at noon; read him into the siesta mood after luncheon, and even sat with him while he slept. In the afternoon she prepared his notes for the evening's work with Charles; dressed herself next as he would have her for dinner; played piquet with him after that, and then read to him until it was time for bed. Dull days, and he knew that for her they must be dull, with her heart elsewhere, and her senses young and tingling. Under her gentle ministry of two years, he was relaxing quietly into old age — and felt it; but he could not deny himself this use of her; and afterwards he had to live upon the memory of it. She allowed him, indeed, as much as he now wished to have; she had schooled him well. He fondled her, and she seemed to wish it; he kissed her cheek night and morning, and at other times she invited his kisses. She gave no signs of being bored; he fancied that she might have been so if she had *not* been with him. She seemed not to miss the fiery talk, the daring imagery, the hardy probing of mysteries earthly and heavenly with which Gervase Poore made her hours fly. In short, during this one week all her womanly defenses were laid aside: she stood to him almost exactly as the young wife of an old man might be well content to stand — privy to him, at his full discretion; and as such he took her, and was able to justify her confidence.

With Charles, her husband under the law, she was precisely the opposite of all this. She kept away from him as much as she could. This, too, the Duke observed. She almost shunned him. He wondered whether this had a physical or a moral cause. Physical, he thought, when he noticed that she had ceased to give him her cheek; moral, he thought, when he once caught the direction of her eyes, fixed upon the unfortunate man with a kind of penetrating pity, which forgave him and justified her to herself in one and the same keen shaft. During this week the Duke supposed (when he reviewed it afterwards) that she and Charles had hardly exchanged three sentences. Good God! he cried to himself, what she must have suffered — and what he! It was this thought above all others which made him take the line that he did in what was to follow.

She was very far from finding the days dull, passed as they seemed to be in the routine of trivial detail. Probably she had never lived so fast or traveled so far in the whole course of her life. Wings had grown upon her unawares; they lifted her spirit to soar. She could contemplate her own body far below her performing its little functions. Compassion and not compunction sent that to the Duke's, and bid it cherish him while it was possible; the pity of a creature freed for fellow-prisoners left behind. She saw nothing of her lover and strong deliverer; did not, presently, hear from him. Everything had been arranged; her hour was fixed. What need of written words, of assurances of the eye, of the arms, of touching lips, when their spirits could meet in the blue — when all night long, while their limbs lay supine, side by side they could stream through the upper air, and thread their swift way in and out of the star-scattered fields of space? Dimly and haltingly as she figured these truths, she lived them intensely; and as her hour drew near her spirits rose, and it seemed to her that she was become so light that her feet would scarcely keep on the ground, and sometimes, coming downstairs, she grew frightened and gripped at the banisters for a hold on herself.

All her pity, all her care, was for the Duke. It was not that she abhorred Charles, but that now he shocked her. He stood for everything that was squalid in life as she now saw it. There was a greatness and a potential freedom about the Duke; but Charles was not only a galley-slave, chained to a bench and an oar — but preferred it so. He had assumed intolerably, and now that she was making a greater Assumption than he could dream of she saw his for what they were worth. Not only she had no pity for Charles, but she had a sort of disapproval of him. She kept aloof from him lest some of his tarnish — some breath — should light upon her shining new wings. In all this she was outrageously unfair, to him and to herself; but women of imagination, in love for the first time in their lives, are not human beings, but winged spirits. They are of the company of the nymphs and fairies — beautiful, swift to seek, single-minded, ruthless in purpose, happy only in activity; they belong to the rest of nature, are non-moral and divine. They, with the rest of nature, are of the infinite, because they are non-social, and have no need to make rules for their protection. They need no protection; nor do any of us, until we lose our wings. Then, running to our pathetic fallacy, we cry upon the cruelty of fate. In this we are, of course, absurd; for you cannot at the same time admire the splendor of the storm and hide yourself from it with an umbrella.

The morning of the 7th of June opened with mist, and unfolded by mid-day to all the fervor of the sun. The leaves winked in the heat, the air seemed liquid and alive; there was no sound but the shrilling of the cicala, or of the lizard rustling dry on the wall. It was too hot to ride. About the darkened house, nevertheless, Georgiana flitted in white like a slim moth. She was pale, large-eyed, and very restless. She hovered about her friend, watching him with intensely deep-seeing eyes, with lips upon which a smile, vague and uninformed, flickered and played and flashed like summer lightning. He was very much aware of it. Once he caught her, looked at her in a way which seemed to challenge her secret. She allowed it, flushed and glowed. He saw, or thought he saw, her eyes grow hot. "You witch," he said, "you fairy Mab, where are your wits hatching mischief?"

She narrowed her eyes to gleams of dark blue. "Far from here — far away," she said, rather breathlessly. He felt her heart beat as he held her. "By the Lord," he said, "I believe you are going to play me a trick." She looked away over the dark length of the room, considering. "Who knows?" she said. And then she turned herself in his arm and looked, not up at him, but at the pin in his cravat. She lifted her hand to it, and turned it as she spoke. "Whatever I do, whatever I am, or become, don't forget that I have loved you as much as I could, and have been proud to be loved by you." He held her closely. "No, no, my child, I shan't forget. We 've been great friends. I never had a greater. You 've been more to me than wife and child." Then he kissed her forehead.

She was still thoughtful, and stirred in his arms, her hand and her eyes still busy with the cameo pin. " I like to hear you say that you won't forget. And in your case I believe it. That is much more than merely being flattered, you know. I wish to believe it — and I do." He looked at her and thought her still a child. She was a mere slip of a thing, like a wand of some willowy tree, which his arm might hold. He knew her not for him, knew that she never had been; but he felt himself growing to dote by reason of the spell of her body's beauty and young strength; and he let her go. " You fairy," he said, " you fairy-wife. When I am under your spell you can do as you please with me."

He saw the gleam of laughing mischief in her eyes. " Don't tempt me," she said, " to prove my power." He pinched her chin.

" On the contrary, my dear, I 'll have a shot at proving mine. You shall put on your best gown to-night. I want to see you while the fit is on you to look well. You shift and veer like a weathercock. But the wind is fair from the west to-day. Who knows? To-morrow you may be playing the nun, or droop like a molting hen-pheasant ! "

She blushed hotly, looked down, and smiled, then shook her head. "Not to-morrow certainly. I believe, never again."

He gave her a sharp scrutiny. "You feel so sure?" She returned it.

"I feel perfectly sure."

"I wish that I did, Georgie," he said dryly. "Remember, I 'm your backer through everything — but sometimes I have qualms."

She gave him her hand then, and while he held it said earnestly, "Have none. And don't forget that nothing will ever make any difference between us. Nothing in the world."

He kissed the little thin hand. "I am sure of it. But I 'm not the only one, you know." He jerked his head towards the library. He saw her frown. For a perceptible pause of time she had no answer. Then she said, "I can't live like this. There 's a point beyond which I can't go. It 's too much. It 's not fair — it 's not reasonable. I 've tried everything." She shook her head fiercely as if to get a thought out of it. "Don't let us talk — talking is so vain."

She closed her eyes, and when she opened them showed him a new clear light as of a spring morning before the sun. "You want me to look pretty to-night? Well, I will. What shall I wear? You shall dress me."

" By George, I wish you meant that! " he said. She laughed.

" I mean, of course, by order. Martha will be aide-de-camp."

He named the gown, he named the head-dress, the very jewels she was to wear. They had been his gift. She promised, and was about to go, but suddenly experienced a great access of tenderness, and leaned towards him. " Dear, kind, trusty friend! " she said, and put her hands on his shoulders. He took her in his arms and held her there. Her tears were not far off, but she held them back. They kissed; she released herself and went to her room.

At dinner her high spirits were maintained. She was pledged by him, and pledged him again; she talked to Charles, laughed at him in a friendly, easy way, and had more to say for herself at that one meal than she had had for a week before. There was about her all the adorable child she had the power of being at will — a playful tenderness, a wooing charm, an innocent malice which had no sting. After dinner she was much quieter, but never depressed or silent. She played out the Duke's piquet, and afterwards read to him and Charles, while he nodded and pretended that he did not, and the other sat glooming over his thoughts.

At ten o'clock she rose and put her book away. "I have read enough. Now I am going. Good-night." They both stood up, and there followed that which they afterwards found memorable. She went to Charles, put a hand lightly on his shoulder, and leaned her cheek to him. "Good-night, Charles," she said. Then to the Duke she gave her hand, which he held.

"Good-night, Duke." Her manner was cool, entirely different from that of a few hours before.

He took her as she chose. "Good-night, my lady. Sleep well."

She raised her brows; her eyes looked scared, but there was a play in them too. "Ah! Who knows? Perhaps I shan't sleep a wink." And then, as he looked at her, she suddenly put up her face to him, and he kissed her fairly.

Upon that she tripped away, but standing at the door, looked back, smiled, and kissed her hand. Within an hour she had left the house — nothing with her — and was with her lover. Even as the two men sat in the library she must have flitted by them along the terrace, and had one been out and about, in that luminous Italian night, never quite dark, one could have seen her white descent down the ghostly broad steps, from terrace to terrace until she was engulfed in the blue depths of the woods.

At the small gate into the road was Gervase cloaked, and carrying a cloak. The moment she appeared he strode forward, and threw this over her. "My Saint — come to me from Heaven!" he said; and, "Quick, love, I am burning."

V

GERVASE'S TEETH

HE took her to a village called Ronciglione, above Rapallo, on a slope of the vine-bright hills which overhang the sea; and there he set up for her a school of love, and taught her the mysteries of it. He encompassed her with all the wild observance which youth and genius ever pay to beauty and gentleness. She was both pliant and enthusiastic. They lived out a dream of the Golden Age; whether it was to last, whether it could last they knew not, neither stayed to inquire. They were nymph and faun, the everlasting shepherd and shepherdess, Daphnis and Chloe of old. Bread and milk, cherries and kisses were their food; fern-fronds made their bed; wood-doves called them betimes in the morning; poetry was their talk. All her former life floated off like the mists of night before such a dawn as this. It was gone like a feverish dream. She grew rosy, her eyes were like stars. She sighed sometimes and clung to him in a moment's anguish that she had no words wherewith to express her joy.

He had had a moment of worldly wisdom in which he wrote a letter to Lancelot. He wrote very shortly, from Rapallo. "I have her safely here, where she may have for the first time reasonable life, health, and a knowledge of essential truth. I am to be heard of from the parish priest of this place. If you come you shall see me, hear me and be heard. Her you shall never see again, God helping."

That punctilio observed, he dismissed Charles and the rest of the world from his mind, and betook himself and his beloved to the heights, there to the study and practice of poetry as it might be lived. He had not mentioned to her the fact of his writing, and was satisfied that she had no desire to communicate with the Duke. He waited serenely for the appearance of Charles, of which, sooner or later, he had no doubt.

A week or ten days passed, and then he knew that the hour was come. He was with his mistress under the olive trees upon the headland, in the afternoon. She lay asleep in his arms, her cheek against his breast. He saw afar two horsemen riding the sea-road into Rapallo, with a third behind them; he saw them without heart-beats, with a slight quickening only of the pulse. He looked down at his blessed burden. She slept deeply, her lashes brushing the round of her cheek. Her beautiful lips were apart, the sleek, adorable curve of the upper showed a faint smile. "She shall have her sleep out, God bless her. I can give her an hour."

She took less than that, stirred in his arms, and showed to his scrutiny one bright eye, and the smile of one rested and wholly at peace.

"You have dreamed, my soul?"

"Yes, of you."

"I have been watching you. I saw a smile creep over you, like sun over the hills."

"That was because you looked at me."

"Please God you shall always smile when I look at you."

"How can I help it? Your looks tell me that you still love me."

"I shall love you forever."

She sighed. "Oh, I pray for that! I hardly dare believe it."

"Take it for granted, sweetheart."

"No, no, no. I will never take anything of yours for granted. I shall be grateful for everything you do for me, great or small."

He drew her upwards till she was within range of his lips, and began to kiss her. Very soon he drew her kisses again, and they knew the heights and depths of their passion.

Then, holding her close, he said, "My life, you shall leave me now. I have a little work to do alone. Will you go into the house and wait till I come?"

She wondered. "Of course I will, dearest, if you wish it. I may n't stay with you?"

"I had rather you did n't. I shall be the quicker done if I am alone. I shall come to you in a few minutes with all done. Then you shall kiss me and say that I have done well."

She saw that he was serious; perhaps even she guessed his meaning. She allowed herself a moment's play. "Perhaps you will have done ill, though. What then?"

"You will kiss me all the same. But however it goes I shall report you everything."

"Can I stay here? Or walk about? Must I shut myself in?"

"No, of course not. I would ask you to stop with me, but that I can do what I want to more freely alone. And I want to know where you are in case I should have to find you at a moment's notice."

She puzzled. "You are mysterious, my poet. But I am sure you are not upon poetry just now. And I am not to be told?"

Then he caught her to his heart. "Yes, yes, my love, you shall be told. I thought that I could keep it from you. I thought that you might keep your dreams. No, I'll tell you.

Lancelot and the Duke are in Rapallo. They are coming to see me. Do you wish to be with me?"

She looked very serious, and thought. She shivered a little and sat plucking at the grass. "No," she said presently, "I don't want to see them. Go to them, dearest. I'll wait for you in the house." She got up and left him, without a kiss. He watched her go, then went down towards the sea.

At the bend of the rough road he saw them coming. There was a parapet there which held it up over the abyss. Below that a slim thread of water poured, amid a riot of leaf and fern. Upon it in the shade the Duke sat to rest, while Lancelot, tall and severely elegant, stood looking upwards. Gervase came swinging down the road, buttoning his coat across his chest. He was bareheaded, his hair flashed golden in the sun. He had the flushed face and hot blue eyes of the Sun-God. Charles saw him, and said to the Duke, "Here's our man." The Duke stood up. "That's the fellow."

Gervase stopped at a ten-foot distance and bowed. "Gentlemen, I have come to meet you," he said, and waited.

Charles was pale, and his dark eyes burned in his head.

"I have come, sir, for my unhappy, my misguided wife. When she is restored to me you and I must have our reckoning."

"We shall reckon now and at once," said Gervase. "I tell you fairly — I have told you already — you will never get her while I am left alive. Misguided you may call her, but unhappy, no. She is happy now, for the first time in her life."

"It is at the cost of her honor and mine if she imagines herself so. It is at the cost of every tie —" Charles began. Gervase sprang into the breach in his ranks.

"It is at the cost of every fetter you have fastened upon her. She is a free woman, her soul is her own. She is no slave now. Your traffic is over. How dare you talk doubtfully of her honor, knowing so little of it, having none of your own?"

"Softly, young man," said the Duke here, but Gervase faced him in turn.

"My lord," he said, "this is no business of yours. You are here, I conceive, as the witness of your friend in what he presently proposes. You shall have your work to do when we come to that. But I am going to give this gentleman something to fight about."

"You are quite right," said the Duke, "and I beg your pardon."

Gervase turned to Charles. "I have the ordinary perceptions of a man, sharpened by my love for her whose confidence you have abused. I know the miserable history of your marriage. She never loved you. How should she, seeing that before you claimed her she had known nothing of men? But you took her affections for granted; you thought that she would do what you call her duty. You claimed her from her parents, and expected to have her heart thrown in. You fool, and you might have had it if you had been able to forget yourself for half an hour a day; and you might have kept it if you had known that a woman was not a thing to be bought, like a horse or a piece of furniture. But no! You cling to the law — the law which was devised by horrible old men who used women as cattle — as brood mares, who could be put to draft work when not with young; who disposed of them as property. And under that law which says, Covet not a man's house, covet not his wife, nor his ox, you shelter yourself, forsooth! You snug rascal, what of her own soul? What of her free will, of her clear eyes, of her judgment, of her character? Are these of no account in the bargain? If they are not, you are a trafficker, neither more nor less; you buy cheap in the market-place; but if they are, and if they *were* of account when you took her, it was your plain business to approve yourself to her, to justify the confidence of her youth. It was your simple duty to implant love in her heart, since even you, I suppose, can understand that without love no woman can become so. Well — and what did you do? How did you justify your assumption of her in her innocence? What did you do to bring love to flower in her heart?

"You! I 'll tell you what you did. You assumed the rights of a husband — not of a lover, which you have never been; but of a husband. You said, I have taken a wife as an incident of my career. I will work abroad and she at home, that I may make a name for myself. Why, you assume everything! You assume the necessity of your career — and I give it you; but you assume the necessity of her part in it — and that you shan't have. Pray, is a career the prerogative of the male? May it not be that your business should be to serve *her,* rather? Not only is that possible, but I tell you that it is certain. She has a plain right to be served by any man who has the grace to see that she is a vase of piety, a fountain of honor and truth, a living symbol of the beauty of God in Heaven. But such things as these you are incapable of seeing. You are a woman-user.

"What did you then? You worked all day long at your sordid affairs of money-getting, station-making. You left her alone without your confidence, without interests or the means of getting them; and when you returned to her, it was not to serve her, but to take your ease. To relax your efforts of the day, you assumed your right to be dull. Not only so, but that you might be duller it was her business, said you, to be cheerful. Pray, what scope for cheer had she, boxed in your house with you for a partner? What business had you to be dull with so lovely a being at your side? How dared you assume a right to be served by such as she is, a messenger from the sky, an angel from Heaven? How dared you sink in your dullness, and pretend in the same breath that you loved? You love! Do you know what love is? Do you know that it is a high ecstasy of wonder and service? You say that you love; but love raises a man on wings — and you sank. You sank deeper and deeper in dullness, and you expected her to share your dullness. How dared you expect that of her? How pretend to love her and make her your drudge? Pooh, sir, it was yourself that you loved, and always have. There is respect in love, and a passion to give, and give, and never be done with giving. Love is a noble rage to beggar yourself for the beloved. It is a noble fire to excel that the beloved may have glory. You have never loved any but yourself. You took her for your convenience, and used her for your needs.

"Fie upon you, there is worse to come." His eyes blazed in his head. He took some steps forward and raised his hand to drive in the blows of his word. "You used her vilely; for your purposes you made her your lure. You traded her beauty, her youth and grace, her purity, her divine attributes. You sent her abroad that she might attract this man's looks"— he swept the Duke into the parley —"that so he might consider your advancement as a means to his own. You knew his character, you knew his ways; you schooled her in this horrible traffic; you became a hirer; you followed what, examined candidly, is the most shameful trade known to this world — and I 'll say no more about it. Employed in this ghastly business I found her, and knew her for what she was. I adored her, I saw God and all Heaven in her eyes; I thought of her night and day, and prepared to serve her. And I have. I have opened her eyes to truth, her heart to love, her soul to the all-pervading God. She is free, she is happy, she is hopeful of all good things. She will be a mother, she will love her children, and they will love her. The world, which has passed her by, will be the richer of her; for I will take care that all men know what a glory and miracle she is. It was Dante's boast that he would report of his beloved things which had never been written of women. That also will I do. I will school the world in the knowledge and love of grace and purity and truth as they are manifested in her. I am a singer, I believe. I shall never sing of any but her — and my whole life shall be a song of praise and thanksgiving. For not only with my lips will I show her radiance, but in every act of mine done in her honor.

" I have done, sir. Now you may have your pleasure of me." He folded his arms over his chest, which heaved with his tide of rage. He bent his head as a man who expects, looking upwards from under his brows at his enemy.

But Charles had nothing to say at present. He had listened with amazement to the torrent of words. He had expected nothing of the kind from the man whom he looked upon as the traitor; but here was himself put on his defense. He was never a ready speaker.

" I shall not attempt to answer your attack," he said presently. " You deal in abusive terms. I cannot follow you. I demand of you the satisfaction which one man owes to another. If you will give me the name of your friend, his Grace here will undertake what may be necessary. I have listened to you long, and to little purpose, that I see."

" I have no friend in the place, as you may easily understand," Gervase replied; " nor do I see the harm of any little irregularity in this game of homicide. You can shoot me at once, if you please. I have no weapon, it is true; but if I had one I should n't use it, so I don't think that need hinder you. If you please to lend me one of yours, I will hold it — to give you a countenance. But let it be understood beforehand that you offer no molestation to your wife."

"I give you no undertaking whatever," said Charles.

"In that case," Gervase said, "I decline to meet you until I have bestowed her in safety."

The Duke interposed. "Now, Mr. Poore, perhaps you 'll listen to me. You stopped me before — and properly; but since then you 've brought me into the affair, and you can't stop me again. Allow me to point out to you in the first place that you have abused my hospitality."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," said Gervase. "I was not a guest of yours."

"That 's a quibble, my man. You would never have been here if I had not asked you."

"Nor would Mrs. Lancelot, my lord," said Gervase.

"Next," said the Duke, "while you profess to serve this lady whom you have tempted from her home, you have done her a very bad turn among her friends. You don't suppose that these things are to be done without scandal — eh?"

Gervase, metaphorically, flew at his throat.

"Scandal, my lord? Who are you to consider scandal when you have set it buzzing about her like flies for the last two years? Do you know what has been said of her by the rascals of the gutter? Maybe you do not; but I who have stood at the doors of your great houses for the mere glimpse of her passing, I know too well. Do you know what your own associates say? You must needs know that. Condemn me if you will, but not where you are in a worse condemnation than I. For you took her into your house, with that wretched man over there trailing behind her, consenting for the sake of his worldly profit, and made the thing hideous. But I take her out of these seraglios and get her into the clean air. For the sake of eternal welfare and honor, it may be necessary to endure a little foul usage from a world of satyrs and swine, since unhappily among such our lot is cast; but it will be over before she sees England again; and meantime she can be happy in the possession of her free soul — here, in this noble country where all are free as she shall be."

The Duke took snuff, and considered his reply. "You are a forcible reasoner, Mr. Poore," he said presently, but not before he had taken a turn or two up and down the road. "You can put your case. Damn it, man, I 'm not above confessing that a good deal of what you have said hits me hard. I 'm old enough to say so, but I 'll add this for myself, that I intended that dear friend no harm at all, and that I don't believe I have done her any. Mind you, also, the stuff I take her to be of is yours and mine too. I think she is of our human clay, not so tarnishable as the rare crystal of your imagination. She 's a beloved woman, but she 's a woman to me, and dear because she 's a woman rather than an angel. But then you 're a poet and I 'm a man of the world. Now, mere scandal I can afford to overlook, as you say that you can, for reason good. I don't hear very much of it — I 'm too much occupied with other matters — and don't pay any regard to that which I do overhear. Perhaps, if I had kept the company you report yourself as keeping, I should have disliked the form in which it was put — but I don't know. I 'm not squeamish, and I 've a notion that hard words hurt nobody, least of all one who was, as she, above reproach. God bless her, *she* did n't hear any of it — so far as I know. That 's all I wish to say." He considered further, and then came nearer. "Now, Mr. Poore, I hope you don't suspect me of evil designs. I 'll tell you this much, that long before you came upon her scene she had made me incapable of that. When she is willing to see me I shall be more than ready. You may tell her that with my love, the love of a man who has derived more comfort than he deserves from her companionship. There 's my last word, but I 'm not the most concerned. I don't advise my friend here to fight you, and I don't think he will. But you shall hear." The Duke nodded his head, touched the brim of his hat. "Good-day to you, Mr. Poore," he said, and turned to descend the hill; but Gervase went after him.

"My lord, I beg one moment of you." The Duke stopped to listen.

"You have spoken," said the young man, "kindly and handsomely. I am much obliged to you. Be sure that your message shall be faithfully delivered."

The Duke nodded. "I am sure," he said. Gervase hovered — he was very red and hot.

"By God in Heaven, Duke, you may trust her with me." The moment was emotional, and the Duke disliked nothing so much. He lifted his head sharply, his cold eyes flamed.

"Why, you young donkey, do you suppose you 'd have been alive at this moment if I had not believed in you? By Gad, sir, I 'd have shot you like a rat in a pigsty. Good-day to you." With that he marched down the hill, leaving Charles in the lurch. But he did not intend Charles to fight, and assumed that Charles, therefore, would not fight.

And rightly. There was no fight in Charles. Throughout the passage between the two lovers of his wife he had stood with head sunk into his breast. Now that one of them had left him he awaited the other, and as he returned lifted up his colorless face and turned him his faded eyes. He could hardly speak above a whisper, and was forced, against his House-of-Commons, Treasury manner, to emphasize every sentence with a jerk of the hand. It added to the sense of effort, and was painful to behold.

He said — while the young man heard him with distress —" Mr. Poore, you have said harsh things to me, and I have not answered them. I cannot answer them, for I believe that most of them are very true."

Gervase, touched to generosity in a moment, would have stopped him, and did indeed extend his hands in deprecation of his recent attack. But Charles only hurried on.

" You cannot have known how true your words were, for if you had they would have been still more terrible — more unanswerable still. Mr. Poore, I am moved to confess to you that the death of her child lies at my door."

" Oh, no, no! " cried Gervase.

" But it is so. She overtaxed her strength when her health could not afford it — when all that she had was called for. She did that to serve me — as she thought, and as I thought. God help me to forgiveness — I am a sinful man."

He changed his tone, having mastered his emotion. Then he continued more quietly. "You have convinced me that I have used her ill — Yes, yes!" And here his voice broke altogether, and he had to turn away his head. Gervase made a movement of the hands to stay him, but Charles recovered. "Yes, yes, loving her as I did, and do, I loved myself more, and have served myself worst of all. So far you have convinced me — but not that I do not love her. Ah, Mr. Poore, I can convince you that I love her devotedly." Inspired by his feeling, he came to the poet with his arms extended as if he would take his pair of hands. "Desiring now her welfare above all things, seeking only to satisfy the call of her heart, of her nature, and of her conscience, I resign my claims to her — I resign her care to you. So far as I am concerned — with my perpetual prayers for her happiness — she is free. She shall be free altogether, by legal means, so soon as may be — she and her fortune."

"No, no," said Gervase. "She will never touch it. I can say no more now. You have put me at your feet."

"Say nothing to her of me," said Charles. "Let her forget me as soon as she may. I would ask her forgiveness but that I know I have it, and desire above all things now that the past may be as dead to her. For her sake, I hope we may never meet again."

"She is here — she is close at hand," Gervase told him, now in a state in which he too would have renounced everything that he had gained. "She will see you, if you —"

"God forbid," said Charles. "I charge you with her welfare. I will do nothing to impair it. So soon as I am in England I will put matters in train. She shall be free to be your wife — entirely free. You shall hear from me."

Gervase stood with folded arms, unable to look up. Charles nervously took off his gloves and slipped a ring from his finger.

"When I was married," he said, "I gave myself this ring upon my wedding day. It was to remind myself of my duty — which, you tell me (and I acknowledge), I too soon forgot. Accept it from me. I don't ask you to wear it, but to keep it. You will not refuse."

"I will not refuse," said Gervase. "I take it as a sign that you trust me."

The ring was handed over. Charles touched his hat, turned and walked down the hill. Gervase stood motionless, staring at the sea. There, as it grew dusk, Georgiana found him. She came behind him softly and touched his arm. He turned, looked at her wildly. She implored, with eyes and moving lips. He gave a cry, and clasped her to his heart. "By God, by God, my Saint, I shall love you on my knees!"

THE END

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